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LETTERS  
AND  
DIARY  
—  
ALAN  
SEEGER



Denison Will Thomas,  
1452 Webster Street,

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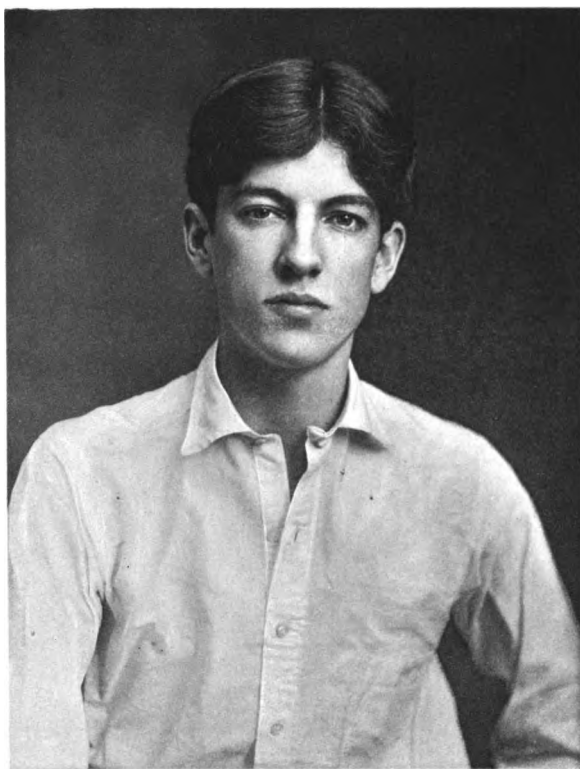
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

**LETTERS AND DIARY**  
**OF**  
**ALAN SEEGER**









Alan Seeger

THE LIFE AND DEEDS OF

JOHN GARRARD

BY  
JAMES GARRARD  
OF THE  
NEW YORK BAR

NEW YORK  
PUBLISHED BY  
J. GARRARD

NEW YORK  
J. GARRARD  
PUBLISHED BY  
J. GARRARD



John G. ...

# LETTERS AND DIARY

## OF

# ALAN SEEGER

Jeune légionnaire, enthousiaste et énergique, aimant passionnément la France. Engagé volontaire au début des hostilités, a fait preuve au cours de la campagne d'un entrain et d'un courage admirables.—Glorieusement tombé le 4 juillet 1916.

(Citation à l'ordre du jour de la Division du Maroc,  
25 décembre 1916.)

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MCMXVII

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THOSE who have read the published poems of Alan Seeger and the sympathetic sketch of his life by Mr. William Archer, in his introduction, cannot have failed to appreciate the motives that led the young American, in his great love for France and her cause, to take up arms in her behalf as a common soldier in the ranks of the Foreign Legion. But it is one thing to yield to a generous impulse and quite another to adhere faithfully to a high resolve through wretched and tiresome hours of unaccustomed hardship and distasteful surroundings. In these pages, written from day to day and from week to week, unchanged and unpolished by afterthought, in the endeavor to make them appear nobler and more consistent than they were when first set down in diary or intimate letter,—no word will be found, either of complaint, of wavering or of discouragement. The miseries of life in the trenches, the exhaustion from long marches, the ennui of inaction, are related simply and faithfully, but, at the same time, they are accepted as the inevitable lot of the soldier and borne with patience pending the arrival of the



## PREFATORY NOTE

hour of battle, for which he longs. Even when cramped in the trenches, this lover of beauty can take keen pleasure in an occasional glimpse of a picturesque vista through the *créneaux*; nor, when his endurance is taxed to the utmost to hold out until the end of a march that lays low many a stronger man among his comrades, does he fail to remember and record the sunlit verdure of the meadows bordering the dusty road along which he toils, with heavy burden, weary almost to the point of dropping. In the lonely vigils of sentry duty, during the hours between night and dawn, when the most courageous feel spirit and hope at the lowest ebb, he can find consolation in "a kind of comradeship with the stars."

So a knowledge of the character and life of Alan Seeger would not be complete without the revelation of patient endurance and steadfast devotion to an ideal contained in this volume. While they lend a confirmatory value to his later poems, written during the same period, they enhance, by contrast, the beauty of his earlier verse, the product of years when the pleasures of life were his goal, and danger and self-sacrifice unthought of. One has only to turn from almost any page of this book, chosen at random, to the sonnets of "Juvenilia," to discover a new pathos in the lines and to feel more

## PREFATORY NOTE

keenly the extent and nobility of the renouncement.

But these pages tell not merely of strain and trial. There are glorious moments of exultation in taking part in the mightiest struggle of history. There is the thrill of the "Marseillaise" and the weird martial music of the Tirailleurs. There is rejoicing in the contact with other brave and strong men. There is the pride of surmounting toil and hardship, which outlasts the suffering. And in spite of the love of life which endured to the last,—inferior only to his conviction that a life could only be worth living when filled with the most vivid emotions,—we know that the manner of Alan Seeger's death was that which he himself had chosen. It threw a brighter and clearer light upon his word and deed and so dignified both that they will live the longer for the years that were cut off from his life on earth. There is solace, too, in the remembrance of what he had written, when the sight of death had become familiar and the peril of it imminent:

"Death is nothing terrible after all. It may mean something more wonderful than life. It cannot possibly mean anything worse to the good soldier."



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*The photograph from which the frontispiece is engraved was taken February, 1910, and was furnished through the courtesy of Mr. F. H. C. Reynolds, of Boston, Mass.*



# I

SEPTEMBER 27-DECEMBER 4, 1914

Drilling at Toulouse. Camp de Mailly. A test of endurance. Sham battles. Distant cannonade. Vestiges of the recent battle. Vertus. The march to the front. Hautvilliers. The vineyards of Champagne. Verzy. Verzenay. A view of Reims. A 55-kilometer march. Fismes. Cuiry-les-Chaudardes. First days in the trenches. The nightly fusillades. Camping in the woods. Bulgarian battle hymn.

## DIARY

*Toulouse, Sunday, September 27, 1914.*—Fifth Sunday since enlistment. The arbor of a little inn on the highroad running east from Toulouse. Beautiful sunny afternoon. Peace. The stir of the leaves; noise of poultry in the yards near by; distant church bells, warm southern sunlight flooding the wide corn-fields and vineyards.

Everything is ready for departure today. We shall leave tomorrow or next day for an unknown destination. Some say Antwerp, some Châlons.

## TO HIS MOTHER

2me Régiment Etranger,  
Bataillon C, 1re Cie., 3me Section,  
TOULOUSE, Sept. 28, 1914.

We are still held up here, though all preparations for departure have been made and every-



## LETTERS AND DIARY

one expected to be off yesterday. We are entirely equipped down to our three days' rations and 120 rounds of cartridges. The wagons are all laden and the horses requisitioned. The suspense is exciting, for no one has any idea where we shall be sent.

We have been putting in our time here at very hard drilling and are supposed to have learned in six weeks what the ordinary recruit in times of peace takes all his two years at. We rise at 5 and work stops in the afternoon at 5. A twelve hours day at one sou a day. I hope to earn higher wages than this in time to come but I never expect to work harder. The early rising hour is splendid, for it gives one the chance to see the most beautiful part of these beautiful autumn days in the South. We march up to a lovely open field on the end of the ridge behind the barracks, walking right into the rising sun. From this the panorama, spread about on three sides is incomparably fine,—yellow corn-fields, vineyards, harvest-fields where the workers and their teams can be seen moving about in tiny figures,—poplars, little hamlets and church-towers, and far away to the south the blue line of the Pyrenees, the high peaks capped with snow. It makes one in love with life, it is all so peaceful and beautiful. But Nature to me is not only hills and blue skies and flowers, but

## ALAN SEEGER

the Universe, the totality of things, reality as it most obviously presents itself to us, and in this universe strife and sternness play as big a part as love and tenderness, and cannot be shirked by one whose will it is to rule his life in accordance with the cosmic forces he sees in play about him. I hope you see the thing as I do and think that I have done well, being without responsibilities and with no one to suffer materially by my decision, in taking upon my shoulders, too, the burden that so much of humanity is suffering under and, rather than stand ingloriously aside when the opportunity was given me, doing my share for the side that I think right. . . .

Letters are taking such a long while to come from America now that I have not much expected to hear from you yet and in fact have heard nothing since I left London last month. But I ought to get something soon in answer to my letter from Rouen. I hope it will show you in good spirits, as you ought to be, for I am playing a part that I trust you will be proud of. . . .

### DIARY

*Camp de Mailly, Sunday, October 4.*—Left Toulouse Wednesday at noon. Marched through the streets behind our *clairons*. Came here via Limoges, Bourges, Auxerre and Troyes. Beauti-

## LETTERS AND DIARY

ful country last afternoon around Saucerre. Uncomfortable nights.

Mailly apparently was about the furthest point reached by the Germans before the French success in the battle of the Marne forced them to retreat. There are numerous vestiges of the recent battle. Some of the buildings in the village are damaged by shells, some that we passed yesterday morning in the train completely demolished. Entrenchments in the fields.

Yesterday we heard cannon for the first time. All day long the occasional rumble of heavy siege guns came from the direction of the frontier. The distance must have been 60 or 70 kilometers. This makes drilling interesting.

Last night two Germans were found in the woods near here by a patrol. One was dead from hunger and exposure and the other nearly so. He said the reason they had not surrendered was that their officers had told them that they would be shot. He said also that there were thirty or forty others in hiding in the neighborhood.

We are four battalions here, two of the first regiment of the Legion and two of the second.

*Sunday, October 11, 1914.*—Very beautiful fall days during the past week. The atmosphere has been quite clear, revealing the most distant

## ALAN SEEGER

horizons of the open, rolling, sparsely cultivated country of this part of France. The first frosts of nights full of stars have begun to color the trees so that each tufted top stands out separate in the yellow sunlight that floods out of skies without a cloud. This weather is unusual; the gray winter days will set in soon.

Yesterday we took a seven-hour march that made the most demand on our endurance that has yet been called for. Only one man fell out, however. We pitched our tents in a high field and went through the entire exercise of bivouacking, taking our sacks inside and lying down six men to a tent. I was sure we were preparing to spend the night, when the order was given to break camp and in a few minutes all the orderly labor was undone. The company was then formed in *colonnes de demi-section par un* and we started back to camp across country, making a wide détour. The whole distance was one continuous battle-field. Everywhere were exploded and unexploded shells. In the woods we came upon several abandoned French knapsacks but found no bodies, though the woods are probably full of them still.

This morning comes the unexpected news of the fall of Antwerp. This is the most important event of the war to date. It means the entire subjugation of Belgium. The Germans, as

## LETTERS AND DIARY

far as I can see, occupy all the territory they have coveted and all that they would keep in the event of their ultimate victory. It is my idea that they will now wage a defensive war entirely, limiting themselves to holding what they have. The impending winter will wonderfully favor them in this plan of campaign. The strong defensive lines they have reared on their front will enable them to detach large forces to cope with the Russians. On the whole, their situation seems good and the task of the French and English in driving them back a desperately hard one.

### TO HIS MOTHER

Camp de Mailly,

AUBE, France, October 17, 1914.

. . . After two weeks here and less than two months from enlistment we are actually going at last to the firing line. By the time you receive this we shall already perhaps have had our *baptême de feu*. We have been engaged in the hardest kind of hard work,—two weeks of beautiful autumn weather on the whole, frosty nights and sunny days and beautiful coloring on the sparse foliage that breaks here and there the wide rolling expanses of open country. Every day from the distance to the north has come the booming of the cannon around Reims

## ALAN SEEGER

and the lines along the Meuse. We have had splendid sham battles, firing dozens of rounds of blank cartridges. Between the *bonds de vingt mètres*, when we lie on the ground, resting the sack on one side and with one's ear in the grass, it has been wonderful to hear this steady pounding of the distant cannonade.

But imagine how thrilling it will be tomorrow and the following days, marching toward the front with the noise of battle growing continually louder before us. I could tell you where we are going but I do not want to run any risk of having this letter stopped by the censor. The whole regiment is going, four battalions, about 4,000 men. You have no idea how beautiful it is to see the troops undulating along the road in front of one in *colonnes par quatre* as far as the eye can see with the captains and lieutenants on horseback at the head of their companies.

I am keeping a diary in a desultory sort of way, but aside from this I am quite incapable of any such literary effort as you suggest, for one simply has not the time. Tomorrow the real hardship and privations begin. But I go into action with the lightest of light hearts. The hard work and moments of frightful fatigue have not broken but hardened me and I am in excellent health and spirits. Do not worry, for the chances are small of not returning and I

## LETTERS AND DIARY

think you can count on seeing me at Fairlea next summer, for I shall certainly return after the war to see you all and recuperate. I am happy and full of excitement over the wonderful days that are ahead. It was such a comfort to receive your letter and know that you approved of my action. Be sure that I shall play the part well for I was never in better health nor felt my manhood more keenly.

CARTE POSTALE, POSTMARKED VERTUS 20 OCT.  
1914

This is the second night's halt of our march to the front. All our way has been one immense battle-field, little villages that are nothing but heaps of ruins, fields torn with artillery fire and heaped with the fresh graves of the soldiers, buried where they fell, a rude cross above and the *képi rouge*. It was a magnificent victory for the French, that the world does not fully realize. I think we are marching to victory too, but whatever we are going to we are going triumphantly. Reims is 47 kilometers away, the Germans 15 beyond.

### DIARY

*Vertus, October 20, 1914.*—Made a short morning's walk of 16 kilometers,—still through the great battle-field. The Germans retreated along

## ALAN SEEGER

the road we marched over. Everywhere in the fields on either hand were the holes made by the *obus* and the graves beside them where the men fell. Extraordinary evidences of the artillery fire. Pine woods with the branches all ripped to pieces; large sized trees broken clean off in the middle. Though several weeks have passed since the battle, the fields are still littered with *débris*. Today we passed through the villages of Marsain and Bergères. The first was completely destroyed, not a house on the main street had escaped the fire. Nothing but blackened walls and here and there the inhabitants standing with sullen faces in their ruined doorways. The scene of the marching column down the ruined street,—a scene that will become familiar to us,—was imposing.

We are in Champagne now and the hillsides, covered with yellowing vineyards, made lovely landscapes along the road, although the weather is still gray and melancholy.

*Hautvilliers, près d'Épernay.*—Made a march of about 28 kilometers. Foggy weather that spoiled the beauties of what would have been a charming landscape. No more signs of battle; everywhere the yellow-green vineyards of Champagne. Passed through Chonilly. Expected to be cantoned in Épernay but kept on in spite of



## LETTERS AND DIARY

considerable fatigue to this lovely little village on the hilltop. Lodged in a most delightful place, a château which seems once to have been a cloister, right behind the old church. We are to sleep in the loft of a barn, where the straw is plentiful. There is a pleasant terrace-garden here, full of flowers, overlooking the valley; the view must be beautiful on sunny days. It seems we are going to Reims tomorrow, or close to it. We are attached to the *cinquième armée*. Lots of troops in Epernay; they lined the sidewalks and watched us pass. Paris autobuses in the streets. All bridges had been blown up and were replaced by temporary structures.

*Verzy, October 22, 1914.*—Made an early start from Hautvilliers and marched here, a distance of about 30 kilometers, with only hour halts. A hard walk; a great many fell out from fatigue. Passed through many villages; the road between Louvois and Verzy, over wooded hills brilliant with autumn foliage, was particularly lovely. Passed camps full of African troops; automobiles filled with officers and autobuses with provisions showed us that we were approaching the front. During our last halt in the woods the colonel passed along the lines with a group of officers and three generals. Shortly afterwards the sergeant returned and

## ALAN SEEGER

announced the extraordinarily unexpected news that we were to stay in Verzy till four o'clock and then leave immediately for the trenches that are only five or ten kilometers beyond here. It is two o'clock now. We are actually to be under fire then immediately. A cloudy, dismal day with occasional drizzling rains. No sound of battle here; everything quiet.

*Verzenay, October 23.*—Half of the regiment was sent to the trenches last night, a battalion of the first and a battalion of the second. Our men slept in Verzy in their harness, that is, wearing the cartridge belt, with sack and gun at our head. At four we got up and, assembling, marched here, a distance of only a few kilometers, where we were billeted again, in a stable at the end of the Rue Veuve Pommery. On the way we passed lots of wagons and cavalry. There were three graves by the roadside at a place where we stopped, a post above each and a placard reading: *Espion, traître à son pays*.

## TO HIS MOTHER

October 23, 1914.

It will surely interest you to get a letter from the front though I have only time to write a word. I cannot tell you the name of the village

## LETTERS AND DIARY

where we are cantonned, for reasons of expediency. We are about 17 kilometers southeast of Reims. I am sitting on the curbstone of a street at the edge of the town. The houses end abruptly and the yellow vineyards begin here. The view is broad and uninterrupted to the crest, ten kilometers or so across the valley. Between this and ourselves are the lines of the two armies. A fierce cannonading is going on continually and I lift my eyes from the sheet at each report to see the puffs of smoke two or three miles off. The Germans have been firing salvos of four shots over a little village where the French batteries are stationed, shrapnel that burst in little puffs of white smoke; the French reply with explosive shells that raise columns of dust over the German lines. Half of our regiment have left already for the trenches. We may go tonight. We have made a march of about 75 kilometers in four days and are now on the front, ready to be called on at any moment. I am feeling fine, in my element, for I have always thirsted for this kind of thing, to be present always where the pulsations are liveliest. Every minute here is worth weeks of ordinary experience. How beautiful the view is here, over the sunny vineyards! And what a curious anomaly. On this slope the grape pickers are singing merrily at their work, on

## ALAN SEEGER

the other the batteries are roaring. Boom!  
Boom!

This will spoil one for any other kind of life. The yellow afternoon sunlight is sloping gloriously across this beautiful valley of Champagne. I must mail this now. There is too much to be said and too little time to say it. . . .

### DIARY

*Verzenay, October 25, 1914.*—On guard from four to six this morning. Mitraillease and rifle fire from the lines. Our company assembled this afternoon and we took a fine walk through the woods on the heights above Verzenay. From the open crests there were wonderful views across the valley. Reims was plainly visible in the middle distance, to the northwest. Could see the cathedral clearly and the church of Saint Remy and the heights at the east of the town where the Pommery works are and where I stood on an evening a year ago this summer when I visited Reims with A. G. The autumn foliage on the hills, the vineyards on the slopes, the delicate tints in the eastern sky, all under a pale afternoon sun, were very beautiful. I think we were going to have some manœuvres, but the appearance of some German aeroplanes coming directly towards us and passing overhead put an end to this plan. We ended

## LETTERS AND DIARY

by gathering wood for the kitchen. Afterwards we sat a long time on the grassy knolls, watching the lines across the valley. Aeroplanes circled continually overhead on reconnaissance and were bombarded with shrapnel from the lines below, without any apparent damage.

*Cuiry-les-Chaudardes, Aisne, October 28.*—Yesterday our *9me escouade* was waked early and hustled off into the darkness before the rest. Our sacks were taken and lifted into a wagon; we found that we were to be the escort of the pack train and the mitrailleuse section. A long day's march was promised us to counteract the comfort of marching without sack. It was in fact the hardest day we have had. We marched with small and few interruptions from 6.30 in the morning to 10.30 at night, in which time we covered probably about 55 kilometers. No food except the scraps we had in our *musettes*. We passed over roads that wind along the southern slope of the valley where Reims is situated. For miles the city lay on our right, but passing at the closest not nearer than six or seven miles I could not see clearly the extent of the damage to the cathedral. The villages lie close together here; the Prussians had passed through them all, but we saw no signs of war except at Marfaux, which had been completely destroyed

## ALAN SEEGER

by fire. Arrived at Fismes after nightfall and exceedingly fatigued, expected to be cantoned there, but kept on marching through the town and out into the dark country again. The cannonade that had been very violent all the afternoon grew louder as we advanced northward directly toward the lines. At 10.30 we halted and were told to spread our blankets in the field beside the road.

I was given sentry duty immediately on arriving and remained in front of the wagons until midnight. During this time an attack by one side or the other took place on the lines only a few kilometers from our encampment. For twenty minutes or so the rifle and mitrailleuse fire was continuous, broken every few seconds by the booming of the artillery, while magnesium lights were shot off from the trenches to light up the battle field. Very impressive in the darkness. Only a few hours before, a soldier of the 127<sup>me</sup> had been telling me at Fismes how his regiment had made such a charge a couple of days ago and had been practically wiped out, leaving 700 dead on the field. At midnight I lay down on the wet ground and managed to get some sleep before three, when we got up again and continued the march 10 or 12 kilometers to this wretched village, where we are lodged for the day in a dirty stable.

## LETTERS AND DIARY

Here we are just behind the lines. We are resting and go into the trenches tonight. At last we shall be under fire.

*October 29.*—Slept here last night, contrary to expectation. We were all reviewed this morning, in the fields lining the road to Beau-rieux, by the general. He showed the captains a new method of marching in single columns under artillery fire and we returned to Cuiry in this formation. Hope to go into the trenches tonight; they are only four kilometers over the hill from here. We have come to the point where fighting is the only thing to do. In this little village there is not a thing to be bought of any kind, not even a morsel of bread or a drop of wine. We have a foretaste of what we shall have to go through in the future. All that we shall have to eat will come from the kitchen of the regiment, and that in small quantities. The poor will be as well off as the rich and money will be the most useless thing we carry.

*November 4, 1914.*—Back in Cuiry again. We marched away a week ago through the forests under a moonlit sky. The road was merely a recent clearing through the trees to move the artillery over and was almost impassably muddy. Arrived at the outer line of trenches I was

## ALAN SEEGER

sent forward into a little trench in the fields to stay awake all night with a half-dozen others on sentinel duty. *Rien signalé.* Next day was peaceful and we spent it perfecting the little bomb-proof shelters along the lines. It was a day well spent, for the Germans that up to this time had been content to direct their fire over our heads on the French batteries behind us began now to turn it on our trenches, informed no doubt by their aeroplanes that buzzed continually overhead. The salvos of shrapnel began bursting in the woods all about us and we were compelled to stay under cover all day long. Darkness would hardly begin before a fusillade would start from the lines near by, the cry of "*Aux armes, aux tranchées!*" would run from door to door and we would hasten out into the night to wait in the muddy ditches while the bullets whistled about us. But these fusillades would always die out, provoked probably only by German patrols seeking to discover our position. After the first experience we were forced to stay up all night, but later we became used to it and were allowed to go back to our holes to sleep. In this way we would hustle out into the darkness four or five times in a single night, at first a little uneasy, but in the end only bothered. In the daytime we slept, oblivious to the shells that burst around us. Cannon of all calibre and at



## LETTERS AND DIARY

all distances—occasional rifle fire and mitrail-leuses—continual whirring of aeroplanes overhead—whistle of passing shells—peculiar report of those bursting high in the air, directed against the aeroplanes.

Four days and four nights of this, in which our company lost two killed and nine wounded. Van der Veldt was killed instantly by a shrapnel ball in the doorway of his hut, only 15 or 20 yards from ours. The position of our trenches was the border of a wood facing the crest where the little village of Craonnelle is situated. Returning here we had a day of repose and then spent the last two at hard labor, digging trenches behind the outer lines. Tonight we go up into the woods again, it seems, this time not to the first line but as reserve. The company that relieved us has had a hard time, they say, and has already lost four killed.

*November 10, 1914.*—Fifth day of our second period in the trenches. Five days and nights of pure misery. We came up here Thursday evening, a foggy, moonlit night, bright enough to show the fields through which we ascended, spattered with shell-holes as thick as mole-hills, and the pine woods full of shattered trunks and broken branches. The Germans had been trying to destroy the Château des Blancs Sa-

## ALAN SEEGER

blons, below which our kitchens are situated, but by some miracle it has escaped. It is here that the *état-major* is lodged. Our position this time has been a claypit on a high summit above the château. Owing to its exposed and dangerous character very formidable bombproofs have been built at this point of the line. To these we have been confined for five days from morning to night. A big hole here in the pit, a few yards from our door, marks the place where three men of Bataillon D were killed by a shell only a few days before our arrival. We expected a heavy bombardment, but five days of continuous fog have made the firing very infrequent, though we have heard heavy cannonading at other points of the line. A *brancardier* was killed a few days ago and there have been a few wounded. It is a miserable life to be condemned to, shivering in these wretched holes, in the cold and the dirt and semidarkness. It is impossible to cross the open spaces in daylight, so that we can only get food by going to the kitchens before dawn and after sundown. The increasing cold will make this kind of existence almost insupportable, with its accompaniments of vermin and dysentery. Could we only attack or be attacked! I would hear the order with delight. The real courage of the soldier is not in facing the balls, but the fatigue

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and discomfort and misery. Tonight we are to be relieved, but whether we are going back to Cuiry or just to the last line of trenches down by the château I don't know. What a winter's prospect if our campaigning is only going to be to alternate between these two phases of inaction and discomfort!

### TO HIS FATHER

November 12, 1914.

. . . I am writing you from our encampment in the woods, a few miles behind the first-line trenches, from which we have just returned for the fifth time. We usually go to a little village where the headquarters of our regiment are, but the Germans bombarded this at long range a few days ago and seem to have done considerable damage. The church has been knocked down and about thirty were killed among the population and the artillerymen quartered there. A shell entered the hay-loft where we had slept only a few days before, killed five and wounded thirteen. So we are camping in the forest now in a big dugout that we have helped to build in other periods of so-called repose.

This is what is distressing about the kind of warfare we are up against,—being harried like this by an invisible enemy and standing up

## ALAN SEEGER

against all the dangers of battle without any of its exhilaration or enthusiasm. From Belfort to the sea now it is the *guerre des tranchées*. I have tried to describe a little what this means in an article that I have managed to accomplish amid the worst of conditions for writing and which I will send you when it appears. In comparison with it a bayonet charge would be desirable and the command welcome to us all.

I am glad to hear that Mother does not worry too much. You probably can follow things well enough to know that I have not been in the North, where the losses have been heavy, but in the center where there has been more or less of a deadlock since the battle of the Marne, and the infantry has not figured much except as artillery support. As long as this condition lasts the danger is very slight and it may last all winter. If it does it will be more to your satisfaction than mine. . .

### TO HIS MOTHER

November 17, 1914.

I haven't seen any more of the little cards I sent you, so I will write a few lines to let you know that I am well and take the risk of the letter getting through. As you may see by the stationery, I have already received the valise and the contents were most welcome. It arrived

## LETTERS AND DIARY

by the wagon while we were camping in the woods. I just had time to mark the things, to transfer what I could carry to my sack and give the rest to comrades. Thaw took the *zarape*; I had a good blanket already. It was out of the question to carry the extra weight; you see all the property we now have must go on our backs on the marches and the weight would astonish you a little could you lift it. I am now well equipped for any weather. Yesterday we had our first flurry of snow, so you see how opportunely the things arrived. . . .

Unfortunately I left my MS. with a printer in Bruges, which is now in the hands of the Germans and the center of the fiercest fighting. After the war I shall return there and look it up. And then I shall think of America again. With my volume and my *médaille commémorative* I fancy I should have enough to account for my European visit in point of thought and action. This experience will teach me the sweetness and worth of the common things of life. The world will be more beautiful to me in consequence. So wait and count on my being with you next summer.

## DIARY

*December 4, 1914.*—Back in the same trenches. Matters have improved here. A well-to-do

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*fermier* sends a *fourgon* in to Fismes every few days, which brings back abundant provisions that the soldiers can buy at moderate prices. In this way we were able to fill our sacks with chocolate and canned stuff in sufficient quantity to tide us over the six days. The trenches have been much improved by the last section. The roof has been made water-tight, more barbed wire has been strung in front, and the earth out of the deepened ditches has been piled round the walls, making the dugout much warmer. By stuffing the *créneaux* with straw we are now allowed to make fires at night, so we can heat our *gamelles* and lie down to sleep in a warm atmosphere. This emplacement is on the whole the pleasantest of any we have been in. The dugout is not uncomfortable now, for we have widened it sufficiently and covered the earth deep with straw; the view in front through the *créneaux* is very cheerful, a broad field and orchard stretching from our position to the crest; behind is a little stream in the woods where we can wash, and there is a spring close to a ruined mill where we can fill our canteens. Here there is a post of the 73d regiment and one can fraternize with the soldiers and hear the narratives of men who have been in the thick of it since the beginning of the war. We went on a patrol a few nights ago, advanced well in front

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of the lines and walked to the outskirts of Craonnelle, where we entered an old barn and brought back armfuls of straw for the dugout.

### CHOUMU MARITZA

Choumu Maritza okrvavena  
Platché oudovitza  
Liouto remiena.

Marche, marche,  
Zarigrade ie nache.  
Raz, dva, trie,  
Mladu bulgarie.

Bulgari mili  
Napred da vrvim  
Ca svitchku cili,  
Gueneral ie c nac

Marche, marche,  
etc.

*(Translation)*

Coule Maritza ensanglantée,  
Les veuves pleurent  
Grièvement blessées.

Marche, marche,  
Constantinople est à nous.  
Un, deux, trois,  
Jeunes Bulgares.

Chers Bulgares  
Nous devons avancer

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Avec toutes nos forces,  
Notre général est avec nous.

Marche, marche,  
etc.

This is the Bulgarian national hymn. My *camarade d'armes* Hulmaja taught it to me and we used to sing it on the marches around Mailly and coming here to the front. He wrote this out for me one day in the trenches and I wrote for him four stanzas of the "Marseillaise."



## II

DECEMBER 8, 1914

Sentry duty. The rôle of the common soldier. Discomforts and misery of life in the trenches. The commissariat. The continual struggle of the artillery.

TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

December 8, 1914.

This is our fourth period of service in the trenches since coming to the front a month ago. We left our camp in the woods down by the château before daybreak this morning and marched up the hill in single file under the winter stars. Passing the second line trenches we walked for some time down a road, torn up here and there with shell holes and obstructed now and then with shattered trees. Through openings in the woods we could see that we were marching along a high ridge and on either hand vaporous depths and distances expanded, the darkness broken sometimes by a far light or the momentary glow of a magnesium rocket sent up from the German lines.

There is something fascinating if one is stationed on sentry duty immediately after arrival in watching the dawn slowly illumine one of these

## ALAN SEEGER

new landscapes from a position taken up under cover of darkness. The other section has been relieved and departs, we are given the *consigne* by the preceding sentinel and are left alone behind a mound of dirt facing the north and the blank, perilous night. Slowly the mystery that it shrouds resolves as the gray light steals over the eastern hills. Like a photograph in the washing its high lights and shadows come gradually forth. The light splash in the foreground becomes a ruined château, the gray streak a demolished village.

The details come out on the hillside opposite, where the silent trenches of the enemy are hidden a few hundred meters away. We find ourselves in a woody, mountainous country, with broad horizons and streaks of mist in the valleys. Our position is excellent this time, a high crest, with open land sloping down from the trenches and plenty of barbed wire strung along immediately in front. It would be a hard task to carry such a line, and there is not much danger that the enemy will try.

With increasing daylight the sentinel takes a sheltered position and surveys his new environment through little gaps where the mounds have been crenellated and covered with branches. Suddenly he starts as a metallic bang rings out from the woods immediately behind him. It is

## LETTERS AND DIARY

the unmistakable voice of a French 75 starting the day's artillery duel. By the time the sentinel is relieved, in broad daylight, the cannonade is general all along the line. He surrenders his post to a comrade and crawls down into his bombproof dugout almost reluctantly for the long day of inactive waiting has commenced.

Rather than imitate my comrades, who are filling the chamber with all the various noises of profound slumber, I shall try to while away some of its tedium by giving you a description of the life of a volunteer in the French army at one of the least exciting points of the present front—that is the mid-centre.

After the brilliant French victory in the battle of the Marne, the Germans, defeated in their attack on Paris, fell back to a line about midway between the capital and the frontier and intrenched themselves strongly along the crests well to the north of the River Aisne. The French, following close on their heels, took up whatever positions they could find or win immediately behind and sat down no less strongly fortified along a line separated from that of the enemy by distances of usually only a few hundred meters. A deadlock ensued here, and the theatre of critical activity shifted to the north, where the issue is still at stake in the tremendous battle for the possession of the seaboard and the

## ALAN SEEGER

base for an enveloping movement which may be decisive. Toward the east the operations have become pretty much confined to the artillery, pending the result of the fighting in the north, which must be decided before an advance can be undertaken by either side on other points of the line.

True, occasionally a violent fusillade to the right or left of us shows that attacks are being made and at any moment are likely to be made, but these are only local struggles for position, and in general the infantry on the centre are being utilized only to support the long line of batteries that all along this immense front are harrying each other at short distances across field and forest and vineyard.

This style of warfare is extremely modern and for the artillerymen is doubtless very interesting, but for the poor common soldier it is anything but romantic. His rôle is simply to dig himself a hole in the ground and to keep hidden in it as tightly as possible. Continually under the fire of the opposing batteries, he is yet never allowed to get a glimpse of the enemy. Exposed to all the dangers of war, but with none of its enthusiasms or splendid *élan*, he is condemned to sit like an animal in its burrow and hear the shells whistle over his head and take their little daily toll from his comrades.

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The winter morning dawns with gray skies and the hoar frost on the fields. His feet are numb, his canteen frozen, but he is not allowed to make a fire. The winter night falls, with its prospect of sentry duty and the continual apprehension of the hurried call to arms; he is not even permitted to light a candle, but must fold himself in his blanket and lie down cramped in the dirty straw to sleep as best he may. How different from the popular notion of the evening campfire, the songs and good cheer.

Cramped quarters breed ill temper and disputes. The impossibility of the simplest kind of personal cleanliness makes vermin a universal ill, against which there is no remedy. Cold, dirt, discomfort, are the ever present conditions, and the soldier's life comes to mean to him simply the test of the most misery that the human organism can support. He longs for an attack, to face the barbed wire and the mitrailleuse, anything for a little freedom and function for body and soul.

My comrade in arms is a young Servian, who went through all the Balkan campaign until the war broke out with the Bulgarians. Then he deserted at Salonica, for he was unwilling to fight against his brother people, and his mother too was a Bulgarian. After the triumphs of the campaign in Macedonia the present method of

## ALAN SEEGER

fighting is almost insupportable to him, and he frets pitifully under the forced inaction. In the Balkans there was no fighting behind earthworks, but all was in the open field and at the point of the bayonet, and seldom did the Turks await the fury of the shock.

In the evening there was no lying down in the cold and darkness, but around blazing campfires the soldiers sang the ancient victorious pæans of their people and danced their national dances. Sometimes they would kindle a big bonfire at some distance from their camp and keep only a lot of little fires among themselves. The Turks would bombard the big fire all night, but around the little ones the soldiers would be left in peace. In the squalor and darkness of our subterranean quarters he tells me often of the glories of those days and of the wonderful exploits of his people—the onslaught at Kumanovo and the charge at Dibra, where he was shot through the body and laid up in hospital for a month and a half.

It is ignoble, this style of warfare, he exclaims. Instead of bringing out all that is noble in a man it brings out only his worse self—meanness and greed and ill temper. We are not, in fact, leading the life of men at all, but that of animals, living in holes in the ground and only showing our heads outside to fight and to feed.

Amid the monotony of this kind of existence

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the matter of eating assumes an importance altogether amusing to one who gives it only very secondary consideration in time of peace. It is in fact the supreme if not the only event of the day. In France the soldier is very well cared for in this respect. In cantonment and under all normal conditions he receives ordinarily coffee and an ample day's ration of good bread the first thing in the morning; then at 10 and at 5 he is served with soup, meat and a vegetable, excellently cooked, coffee and wine, not to mention such little occasional luxuries as chocolate, confitures, brandy, etc.

In the trenches this programme is necessarily modified by the distance from the kitchens and the impossibility of passing back and forth in daylight on account of the artillery fire. When we first came to the trenches we made the mistake of having our kitchen too near in the woods. Whether it was the smoke that gave it away or one of the hostile aeroplanes that buzz continually over our heads the Germans soon found its range and with one man killed and half a dozen wounded the cooking brigade was forced to move back to the château and take up its quarters at a point in the woods at three or four kilometers from the line of the trenches.

Since then the matter of *ravitaillement* is arranged as follows: every morning at 3 o'clock

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a squad of men leaves the trenches and returns before daybreak with the day's provisions—bread and coffee, cheese and preserved foods, such as cold meat, pâtés, sardines, etc. The ration is very small, but the nature of life in the trenches is not such as to sharpen one's appetite. In the evening another squad leaves immediately after sundown. Every one waits eagerly to hear the clink of the pails returning in the dark. It is a good meal, a soup, or stew of some kind, as hot as can be expected in view of the distance from the kitchen fires, coffee and wine, and we all gather about with our little tins for the distribution.

These nightly trips to the kitchen are sometimes a matter of considerable difficulty, for frequent changes of position often find us unfamiliar with the course of the paths through the woods, which are newly cut, impassably muddy and ill defined. Notwithstanding the danger of going astray in swamp and thicket and the labor of bringing back a heavy load in the dark it is considered a privilege to be assigned to this duty because it gives a little activity to relieve the day's tedium. Single file, with rifle strapped to shoulders, we flounder on, wet to the ankles, the black forest all around, each man carrying half a dozen canteens besides his other burdens. Our water comes from a spring down by the château.



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To supplement the regular rations with little luxuries such as butter, cheese, preserves and especially chocolate is a matter that occupies more of the young soldier's thoughts than the invisible enemy. Our corporal told us the other day that there wasn't a man in the squad who wouldn't exchange his rifle for a jar of jam. It is true that we think more about securing these trifles than we do about keeping our rifles clean. Nor is it an easy matter to get such things. The country where we are now has been thoroughly fought over, so that the poor inhabitants and their stocks of goods have suffered severely from the continual passing of troops in action. The countryside is stripped as a field by locusts.

In the village where we are billeted during our intervals of rest between periods in the trenches there is not a thing to be had for any price. Our pocket money is so much waste paper. By sending to remote towns, paying commissions and exorbitant prices, one can manage to get a few things. Once in the trenches these articles are precious beyond gold. In the course of bartering services are paid for in chocolate, for money is held as worthless for wages.

Though modern warfare does not allow us to think more about fighting than eating, still we do not actually forget that we are on a battle

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line. Ever over our heads goes on the precise and scientific struggle of the artillery. Packed elbow to elbow in these obscure galleries one might be content to squat all day long, auditor of the magnificent orchestra of battle, were it not that one becomes so soon habituated to it that it is no longer magnificent. We hear the voices of cannon of all calibres and at all distances. We learn to read the score and distinguish the instruments. Near us are field batteries; far away are siege guns. Over all there is the unmistakable, sharp, metallic twang of the French 75, the whistle of its shell and the lesser report of its explosion. When the German batteries answer the whistle and explosion outdistance the voice of the cannon.

When one hears the *siflement* the danger has already passed. The shells which burst immediately overhead and rattle on the roof of our bombproof dugout come unheralded. Sometimes they come singly, sometimes in rapid salvos of two or three or four. Shrapnel's explosive report is followed by the whiz of the flying balls. Contact shells or *marmites* explode more impressively, so that the earth trembles. Shrapnel shatters trees and snaps good sized trunks as if they were twigs; contact shells dig holes eight or ten feet across all over fields. When lines are close, as ours are now, sniping goes on

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all the time, especially from the German side. At night sometimes a violent fusillade will bring us to arms; out of our burrows we tumble to find the hillsides ablaze with the Bengal lights from the German trenches, where our enemies are as alert and mystified and uneasy as we are.

None of these alarms has come to anything where we were, but we hear prolonged roars of rifle fire, punctuated with steady booming of artillery, from the line alongside us sometimes, which make us realize that a desperate attack is always possible.

In clear weather aeroplanes buzz overhead all day long. Both sides bombard at them with shrapnel, which makes a queer little whirl when it explodes high in the air. Never have I seen the lines bring an airman down, for the puffs of yellow smoke break too low, and high up in the clouds the machine goes humming on, contemptuously dropping its signal fuses. A few days ago I did see a German aeroplane sent to the ground by a French monoplane.

We were in camp in the woods behind the lines when the familiar outline of a Taube against the winter sky drove us into hiding in our cabin. Suddenly, without having noticed its approach, I saw a French aeroplane close with its enemy. There was the popping volley of a mitrailleuse and the wounded German machine dipped

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abruptly and came down in a long volplane, but I could not see whether the pilot had height enough to make his own lines before his wheels struck the ground.

It is toward evening that the cannonade is always fiercest. With darkness it almost completely subsides. Then the sleepy soldiers, cramped and dishevelled, crawl out of their holes, rouse themselves, stretch their legs and take the air. Everybody turns out like factory workmen at 5 o'clock. The kitchen squad departs, others set to work repairing smashed defensive earthworks and the night's first sentinels go on.

Sentry duty, which may be all that is melancholy if the night is bad and the winter wind moans through the pines, may bring moments of exaltation if the cloud banks roll back, if the moonlight breaks over the windless hills or the heavens blaze with the beauty of the northern stars. It has been so for the last few nights, since I commenced these notes. A cold wave has frozen all the bad ways; a light snow has fallen and at night the moonlight flooding out of a frosty sky illumines all the wide landscape to its utmost horizons. In the hollow the white shell and chimneys of the ruined château stand out among the black pine groves; on the crest opposite one can trace clear as in daylight the

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groves and walls and roadways among which wind the silent and uncertain lines of the enemy's trenches.

Standing facing them from his ramparts the sentinel has ample time for reflection. Alone under the stars, war in its cosmic rather than its moral aspect reveals itself to him. Regarded from this more abstract plane the question of right and wrong disappears. Peoples war because strife is the law of nature and force the ultimate arbitrament among humanity no less than in the rest of the universe. He is on the side he is fighting for, not in the last analysis from ethical motives at all, but because destiny has set him in such a constellation. The sense of his responsibility is strong upon him. Playing a part in the life of nations he is taking part in the largest movement his planet allows him.

He thrills with the sense of filling an appointed necessary place in the conflict of hosts, and facing the enemy's crest above which the Great Bear wheels upward to the zenith, he feels, with a sublimity of enthusiasm that he has never before known, a kind of companionship with the stars!

Six days is the regular period for service in the trenches under normal conditions. Often enough it seems close to the limit of physical and moral strain which a man can bear. The

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last night the company packs up its belongings and either in the twilight of evening or dawn assembles and waits for the shadowy arrival of the relieving sections, to whom the position is surrendered without regret. We march back over the wretched roads and pass our three days' interval of so-called rest either billeted in the stables and haylofts of the village or encamped in the woods around the château.

In bad weather the first is the more agreeable, for one has a tight roof over his head, can wash, and fraternize with the artillerymen and the soldiers of other regiments. But if the skies are clear it is pleasant to camp by the château, where a steep hillside in the forest is covered with the rude little cabins that the soldiers put up when the leaves were still on the branches. Here one may make fires at will, and at night-fall, with the smell of wood smoke and the twinkle of lights among the trees, the conditions of life in the army come closer to what we imagined they would be when we enlisted.

Such then is the part that has been assigned us in our first month of field service—a not very active part so far but one which novelty has made interesting. How long will it continue? What change will the future bring us? This is the most frequent subject of surmise and discussion in trench and cantonment. If our winter

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is to be nothing but a series of alternations between the discomforts of crowded dugout and squalid village there is not one of us who would not be glad to be shifted immediately to the north to bear all the rigors of an open campaign in order to share some of its action. But if victory in the north determines an advance all along the line it will be as well to be at this point as at any other.

North of us, behind the bristling crest, the frontier is not far. Between and directly on our road is the cathedral city on the hill. Little more than a year ago I walked in its ancient streets and from its lofty ramparts in the shade of its cluster of Gothic towers, looked off eastward at twilight over the broad, beautiful landscape. To dream of re-entering this city as we would re-enter it has filled many a night's watch. The crest opposite us would have been carried at the point of the bayonet, our ranks would have been thinned, but the flag would still wave in the undulating line of blue and red as it winds up the hillside to the town and rolls through the antique gateway, and our officers would look never so gallant riding at the head of each battle-worn company.

The midwinter afternoon would bathe in ruddy splendor the beautiful towers and flag bedecked balconies. From the one would peal forth the

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thunder of welcoming bells, from the other the acclamation of thousands. The army of deliverance, we would enter the narrow streets of the ancient city, the first stage of our long victorious advance would be accomplished, and amid the benedictions of a ransomed people our hearts would dilate with that supreme emotion that life can offer, that emotion idealized on the fields of France, of her revolution and empire, whose name is that of the winged figure that her soldiers love to picture at the head of their victorious battalions—*la Gloire!*



### III

DECEMBER 14, 1914—JANUARY 11, 1915

A dangerous position. The trench dugout. Christmas in Cuiry. A walk to Beaurieux. New Year's Day. Visit to Chaudardes. Adventure on *petit poste*.

#### TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

December 14, 1914.

We have been camping in the woods for the last three days. These intervals of rest between our periods of service in the trenches are usually passed in cantonment at X—, a few kilometers behind the lines. During our last absence the Germans got its range well and bombarded at long distance across the hills. The precision of their fire seems to have astonished those who witnessed it. At half past 10 at night the shells began to fall on the peaceful little village. When they ceased thirty soldiers and inhabitants had been killed.

In the hayloft where we had slept a few nights before a *marmite* crashed through the roof and killed five outright and wounded thirteen of our comrades of another company. So we did not return to X— this time. Those who remained in the village spent their time pulling down what

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was left of the church tower, whose peaked belfry, showing across the ridge, gave away the position of our headquarters to the hostile batteries. We halted half way and went into camp in a huge bombproof hut in the sand under the bleak branches of the winter forest.

This morning we came back to the trenches for the sixth time. I happen to have kept track of our periods of trench duty (though I have lost count of the days of the week and month), but there is really nothing to distinguish this from the other stages of the monotonous existence that this *guerre des tranchées* imposes upon us at present. Once more the reveil in the dark, the hasty packing and departure, the march out of the woods and up the hillside, this time under the last quarter of the last moon of the year. A screen of driven clouds pales its radiance and hides the stars.

Crest after crest the forested hills spread out beneath and around us in the vast twilight. A pine grove crowns the ridge that we are mounting under cover of darkness. We have been told that the position we are going to occupy is one of extreme danger from artillery fire. It is not the gruesome recitals of the ambulance men that make us believe it. It is not the riven branches nor the craterlike holes half full of rain water in the fields. On the border of the

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grove are the fresh graves of our comrades. They have written the soldiers' names on the bars of the little crosses; on the poles droop their red *képis*.

The section to be relieved is waiting for us in the shadow of the pine grove. Once more the hasty transfer, the descent into the black dug-out, the jostling and disputes as the men get placed in the dark. A chill wind sweeps through the underground gallery. Some one strikes a match and tries to rekindle with straw from the floor the embers that smoulder here and there in holes picked out of the wall. The sergeant stops him before he has gone very far. It will soon be daylight, when no blue smoke must be seen curling out of the pine trees.

And while we are getting settled a brusque voice of command calls in through the doorway. Formally forbidden to go out during the day. It is a sinister confirmation of the reports of the peril of our situation. Certainly, shivering here in the unfamiliar dark, the prospect of the six days before us is not cheerful.

*Guerre des tranchées!* What is it that this word "trench" conveys to those who read it continually in the war bulletins—those who are disinterested, with curiosity; those whose hearts are at the front, with anguish? Probably much of what it would have conveyed to me

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before the war—a kind of open irrigation ditch where the soldiers had to fight up to their knees in water, how they slept and how they ate being questions I did not ask myself. Certainly the condition of the combatants is not anything like this, yet on the other hand the comfort and elaborate construction of some of these works of defence, such as I have seen them described by soldiers in their letters home, are of examples which I at least have never had the good fortune to inhabit.

The typical trench dugout resembles catacombs more than anything else. A long gallery is cut in the ground with pick and shovel. Its dimensions are about those of the cages which Louis XI. devised for those of his prisoners whom he wished especially to torture, that is, the height is not great enough to permit a man to stand up and the breadth does not allow him to stretch out. Down the length of one curving wall the soldiers sit huddled, pressed close, elbow to elbow. They are smoking, eating morsels of dry bread or staring blankly at the wall in front of them. Their legs are wrapped in blankets, their heads in mufflers.

Slung or piled about them, filling every inch of extra space, are rifles, sacks, cartridge belts and other equipment. A villainous draught sweeps by. Tobacco smoke and steaming breath

## LETTERS AND DIARY

show how swiftly it drives through. The floors are covered with straw, in which vermin breed. The straw is always caked with mud left by boots which come in loaded down and go out clean. To get new straw we sometimes make a patrol in the night to the outskirts of a ruined village in front of our lines and take what we need from a deserted stable. It is our most exciting diversion just now.

The roof of the dugout is built by laying long logs across the top of the excavation; felling trees for these coverings occupies a large part of our rest intervals. On the completeness with which these beams are covered with earth depends the comfort and safety of the trench. Wicker screens are often made and laid across the logs, sods are fitted over the screens so as to make a tight covering and then loose earth is thrown back on top. This is an effective protection against all but the heaviest shells. If the roof is badly made, out of branches, for instance, the rain drips through and makes life even more miserable inside.

Where the lines run close together the soldiers sleep in the simple trenches and fire through small holes in the wall of the combined trench and dugout. Generally there is room to build the trenches out in front of the dugout or alongside. There is a section of a company of infan-

## ALAN SEEGER

try for each trench, and between the trenches there are deep communication ditches.

A squad has stayed behind in the woods to bring us the day's provisions. Before daylight it arrives and the distribution takes place. Great loaves of bread are handed down the line; each man takes his ration of half a loaf. There is one box of sardines for each two men. A cup of coffee, a small piece of cheese, a bar of chocolate must last us all day, until darkness permits another squad to leave the trench to go down after the evening soup. After food comes mail. Too much praise cannot be given the Government for handling the soldiers' mail so well. There are daily distributions on the firing line.

The short winter day has dawned. Its feeble light falls through the narrow doorways and all is now clear in the crowded dugout. The sound of voices grows less and less as the men fold themselves into their blankets, and one by one, tired out by the night watch, go off to sleep. I never could do this and have always fought against sleepiness in the morning. For with our life of darkness and chill I find a little sunlight, even if all I can get is through a narrow dugout door, is indispensable for the brightening of one's hours of reflection. I usually wait until the first cheee-pann-pann-pann! of the shrapnel bursting overhead marks the opening of the

## LETTERS AND DIARY

artilleryman's working day before I tumble off to sleep.

The smell of the wicker screens and the branches in the dirt on top of the trench reminds me of Christmas odors in American houses decorated with green things for the holidays. Then the smell of powder from the shrapnel kills the holiday reminder. I dare say Christmas will pass here without any change in our style of life. The insolent crest across the valley will still stand up, inviting steel to come and take it, and we shall go on waiting as patiently as we can for the day when we shall be ordered to advance against the shell and steel of the invisible enemy.

It will be a happy day for all of us, for uncomfortable inaction has more terrors than shell and steel.

### DIARY

*December 22, 1914.*—Returned to Cuiry after five days in trenches. Will be here, it seems, until Christmas. Great things seem to be brewing. Rumors of a general advance in preparation. Last night a violent cannonade and rifle fire all along the line,—the first about eight o'clock, the second at midnight just after I had come in from guard. Hope this means business.

Went to a farm near by today and, waiting

## ALAN SEEGER

for coffee to be heated, missed *rassemblement* of company at noon. May get into trouble for this later but it has given me at least a free afternoon. An afternoon of memorable beauty; mild, sunny weather and loveliest blue skies. Sitting enjoying it on a pile of *betteraves* in the field behind Cuiry. It is so seldom one can get off by oneself to have a little solitude and time for uninterrupted reflection. I shall never forget the beauty of this winter landscape, the delicate skies, the little villages under their smoking roofs. Am feeling perfectly happy and contented. This life agrees with me; there will be war for many years to come in Europe and I shall continue to be a soldier as long as there is war.

*December 31, 1914.*—Spent a unique and agreeable kind of Christmas in Cuiry, brightened by thoughtful friends in Paris, who sent us all packages laden with everything good to eat and wear. Christmas Day itself was one of the most beautiful of cold winter days. Rose early and walked up to the farm over the frost-whitened hillside. Hot coffee and bread. Beauty of dawn, white landscape and steaming village. Pleasure of opening packages and reading letters in the hayloft. After morning soup, *rassemblement* and march off to work.



## LETTERS AND DIARY

But I played truant again and slipping off with gun slung over shoulder walked alone (not without considerable risk) to Beaurieux. The soldier to whom I had given my wash the week before had been moved to Beaurieux, and as it was absolutely necessary to have the change of clothing, I had to be so far unscrupulous. Beautiful walk through the sunny fields. Accomplished object in Beaurieux and enjoyed walking about town, buying the few little things that were to be bought and talking to soldiers of other regiments. Home at sundown. Heated plum-pudding and made hot chocolate after supper and stayed up late talking in candle-lit loft.

*January 5, 1915.*—We left the Moulin trenches and marched back to Cuiry on New Year's eve. Spent a pleasant four days there. On New Year's Day we rose before daybreak and the whole section was marched off to take a bath. We walked to Maizy and then turned off down the Canal de l'Aisne. At a point several miles beyond where the poteaux read about 16 kilometers to Berry-au-Bac and 34 to Soissons we came to a big sugar refinery. Here were excellent facilities for bathing and each man had a fine hot shower and the cold water hose turned on him afterwards if he wished. In a barge moored on the canal-side a woman sold us hot

## ALAN SEEGER

coffee and bread too. This little excursion was a pleasant diversion taking us for a moment out of the narrow circumscription we had been moving in for the past two months.

I had always been anxious to visit the little neighboring town of Chaudardes, whose picturesque belfry peeps up over the hillside only a few kilometers to the east. This was a good occasion and so in the afternoon, which was one of lovely skies and mild weather, I walked over. The little church proved to be exquisite both in line and in the patina of the old stones. It had not been desecrated either, like the poor little church at Cuiry, where the legionaries are quartered regularly now, sleeping in the pews, eating off the altar and raising a laugh sometimes by going through vulgar mockeries of the Catholic ritual. On the contrary, all was neat and well kept up inside. There was no one there when I entered except a soldier of the 36<sup>me</sup>, who was playing very well on the little organ. I sat long and listened to him in the peace and quiet of the little white-washed interior.

Wandering about the village later I came across another soldier in a black sweater with an American flag pinned to it. I remarked in accosting him that it was the *drapeau de mon pays* and by so doing made a charming afternoon acquaintance. It appears that the man,

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who was an Alsatian, had become liable to military service in the French army in some way, but going to the United States when he was 14 had escaped doing it. He was given amnesty, however, on condition of being mobilizable in case of war. Travelling on the Continent therefore at the outbreak of hostilities, he went immediately to his *dépôt* at Caen when the order to mobilize came out and became incorporated in the *36me de ligne*. He was made cook for the *sous-officiers'* mess, in which capacity he was serving when I met him. He took me around to the kitchen and, seeing that his battalion was leaving for the trenches that evening and soup was early on that account, he made me stop and gave me a warm meal before returning to Cuiry. He gave me all kinds of provisions too and took me over to a *ferme*, where I met a young sergeant who spoke English well. We had coffee together and he told me all kinds of anecdotes about the experiences of the *36me*. I returned to Cuiry at sundown.

### TO HIS FATHER

January 11, 1915.

After weeks of inaction in trenches where the danger of attack was slight and there was nothing worse to be feared than the constant artillery fire, our company was moved last time

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into the little village of C——, the most dangerous part of the sector we are holding, where the line runs too close under the crest occupied by the Germans to be menaced by bombardment but where the patrols come down every night and harass our outposts in the most nerve-racking kind of warfare. Four days almost without sleep, constant assignment to *petit poste*, sometimes 12 out of 24 hours on guard in the most dangerous positions. It was in one of these that I came for the first time in immediate contact with the enemy in a most unfortunate affair. I was standing guard under the wall of a château park with a comrade when a patrol sneaked up on the other side and threw a hand grenade over, which sputtered a moment at our feet and went out without exploding. Without crying to arms, I left the other sentry on the spot and walked down to the *petit poste*, about 100 metres away and called out the corporal of the guard. We walked back to the spot together and had hardly arrived when another bomb came over, which exploded among us with a tremendous detonation. In the confusion that followed the attacking party burst in the door that covered a breach in the wall at this spot and poured a volley into our midst, killing our corporal instantly and getting away before we had time to fire a shot.

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On the 20th we shall have been three months at the front. Persistent rumors have it that we are going to be sent back to Orléans for a while on that date to rest. The English and Belgians in the regiment are going to their respective armies and the battalion is going to be generally reorganized. . . .

## IV

FEBRUARY 5, 1915

The Kaiser's birthday. A desolate village. The ruined châteaux. An empty wine cellar. An immaculate library. The sentinel's hallucinations. Comforts of a cellar. A *coup d'audace*.

TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

February 5, 1915.

We are back in cantonment after eight days on the firing line. This is the longest stretch we have yet done without relief. The reason? The Kaiser's birthday. We looked for trouble on that day and there was no lack of indications that we were going to have it. There has been talk of a mysterious paper thrown into the lines with the warning that a general attack was to be made. And in the still winter nights behind the hostile crest the continual noise of distant trains and motors could be heard, bespeaking a concentration somewhere along the line.

The preceding night I was out on sentinel duty. In a clear sky, the moon, a few nights from the full, flooded the hillsides, making it impossible for patrols to circulate. Not a shot was being fired. The sinister silence confirmed

## LETTERS AND DIARY

every suspicion that something was under way. At midnight a French battery behind us broke it rudely and ironically by firing twelve times in succession over the crest as a birthday greeting. The enemy did not respond. And so the long night wore away and the day came and passed without incident for us.

The blow had fallen on some other point of the line. Strewn pitifully along the summit of the crest opposite we who were on guard could still see the bodies of the French soldiers where they have been lying ever since September, when the magnificent *élan* of the battle of the Marne finally broke on this bleak hillside and ever since when both sides have been sitting facing each other, neither risking the perils of a further attack. Once more we have been cheated in our hope for action, but it may not be for long.

The greatest change has come over our life here lately. In my last letter I described the soldier's days and nights in the trenches, and I am afraid I drew a rather gloomy though by no means exaggerated picture. For the last month, however, we have not been living in trenches at all, but in a ruined village. It has been much more romantic. Along the vast battle line from Belfort to the sea each regiment has its sector of a few kilometers to defend.

## ALAN SEEGER

Ours is a corner of field and forest fronting on the semicircular crest of the plateau where the enemy are intrenched—a good foothold on one end of the crescent, too. Here the soldiers live in the earthen dugouts, amid all the discomforts I described. But at the foot of the hill, corresponding exactly to the position of the stage in a Greek theatre, lies the village of C—. From all the various points of the sector that we have been assigned to its battered houses and great burned down château have been visible. Other companies, though, had held it up to a month ago, when it came round to our turn.

It was under the full moon of a month past that we marched into C— for the first time. I shall never forget the impressiveness of that stealthy, silent entrance. We had left our cantonment at midnight. Five or six kilometers through the forest and the road came out into a pleasant open country, covered with orchards. Sharply silhouetted in the moonlight against the black slopes of the plateau behind were the bright walls and peaked tile roofs of the typical little French town. I had become familiar in our march to the front from Mailly with the tragedy of these pretty centres of peace and happiness made desolate by war. But no scene of ruin that we passed through exceeded the spectacle that met our eyes here.



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There had been no general conflagration in C——, it is true, for the Germans had not had time to fire it as they have done systematically wherever they could. But there was literally not a house that had not been riddled with shrapnel or disembowelled by the deadly "marmites" that must have fallen on it in a perfect inferno of fire. Picking our way through the débris that littered the streets we filed in through that picture of desolation that makes always so striking a background for a column of infantry advancing.

Poor ruined villages of northern France! There they lie like so many silent graveyards, each little house the tomb of some scattered family's happiness. Where are the simple, peace loving country folk that dwelt here when these windows were squares of yellow lamplight, not, as now, blank as holes in a skull? The men away at the war or already in their graves; the women and children refugees in the south, dependent upon charity. The pity of it all is that the French guns have done and have had to do the material damage.

When the Germans marched back in August there was no resistance to their advance. But it was with the artillery close on their heels that they were chased out in September. It is frightful to think that only at such a price can the

## ALAN SEEGER

French regain their conquered territory. If the enemy are to be driven across the frontier does it not mean that every town and village between must be laid in ruins? The alternative is staggering. . . .

At C—— our quarters are most picturesque. They are the wine cellars of the village's two châteaux. Here the soldiers have been able to bring straw, coal and candles, and with a good roof over their heads, safe from shells and from rain, enjoy a degree of comfort quite exceptional for a position where the crack of the German mausers as they snipe at sentinels seems at our very doors and where the mitrailleuse upon the hillside could rake our cellar door itself were it not for the encircling groves.

The big château has been completely burned down. Nothing remains but the shell. It sits in the midst of an immense, heavily wooded park, the wall of which, several kilometers long, forms part of our line of defence. Pretty paths intersect the dense groves. There are benches here and there, fountains and summer houses. The lawn that encircles the château slopes down behind to a charming little artificial lake. Everything bespeaks the pleasure retreat of some man of wealth and taste. Before the ruined mansion, truly seigniorial in its proportions, stand ancestral pines.

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Nothing could be more romantic on a moonlit night than the view of these silent walls gleaming amid the great black cones; nothing more eerie than the silent grove, in which there is never the complete assurance that the park wall completely separates one from the lurking enemy.

The little château is in the town itself, surrounded by no considerable estate. It has been ripped open with bombardment, but was not set on fire. Strange enough, the pillaging of six months has not begun to exhaust the loot that litters its floors knee deep. Here all the possessions of some once comfortable family lie scattered about as they have been pulled from desk, cupboard and bureau. Sheets and pillowcases lie mixed up with family photographs and correspondence in a chaos of disorder.

Most pathetic to me was a little girl's post-card collection—cards from all over Europe, with their little messages of love or greeting. But most precious were the remains of a beautiful library, the last thing to be violated by the rude hands that have ransacked everything else and left not a bottle of wine in the whole town. Here, stacked just as they were before the invasion, I found finely bound, immaculate sets of Rousseau, Voltaire, Corneille and Racine. The wind and rain that blew in through the im-

## ALAN SEEGER

mense rents in the walls had not yet harmed them in the least. They were as fresh as the day they left the famous early nineteenth century presses of which they were the choicest examples.

I took away a few of these volumes, esteeming that the pious duty of rescuing an old book doomed otherwise to certain destruction might absolve me from the gravity of the charge that such an act made me liable to.

The advanced position that we hold in this village and the fact that we are far in front of our own batteries minimizes the danger from artillery fire. Few shells, in fact, fall on C—— nowadays, then only when a group of soldiers expose themselves unnecessarily. But every night the patrols come down from the hillsides, and we are out against that war of ruse and surprise, of treachery and stealth, which is most trying to the strongest nerves. Under these conditions sentinel duty ceases to have the air of a mere formality; it means a grave danger, a terrible responsibility. And seeing that the guard cannot be too rigid at this point we are all forced to undergo with heartbreaking frequency the ordeal of the *petit poste*.

The *petit poste* is the outpost which furnishes the most advanced sentinels before the enemy. Its composition and general arrangement may vary according to circumstances, but typically

## LETTERS AND DIARY

they are as follows: At daybreak a dozen men and a corporal go out to the position and install themselves behind the rude shelters or defences that have been constructed.

During the day the guard is simply two men on two hour watches. At night, however, the post is broken up into three little posts of four men each. These are in turn divided into relays of two, which alternate at intervals of one or two hours, as they choose, so that each man has six or seven hours on guard during the night. At daybreak the whole squad is in turn relieved, for picket duty on *petit poste* is always twenty-four hours. During that time, whether on guard or off, no one is supposed to sleep.

To us, who are lodged now regularly in the cellars of the big château, guard usually falls at points along the park wall. At sunset, in little groups of four, we take up positions at a door, on a scaffolding rigged up inside, or in a little trench dug without. "Guard" means standing here with every nerve strained on the dark world outside; relief, sitting huddled in a blanket near by, walking up and down to shake off drowsiness or stamping the feet to drive out the cold.

When moon or star light makes it possible to see some distance into the orchard, field, or grove outside this job is not so bad. But when the

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sky is covered and complete darkness draws the lurking menace down to within a few meters of this post then the sentinel creates for himself a thousand imaginary dangers.

As the night wears on the tension begins to tell. The senses of sight and hearing become subject to strange hallucinations. Surely some one is whispering out there in the darkness. Or else it is a low whistle, or such signals as pass between the members of a patrol. A black spot in the night takes shape and seems to move. A human form detaches itself from a tree trunk. As a shot rings out near by along the wall the sentry's hand tightens on his rifle.

The very suspicion of a sound, a broken twig or a trodden stone, may startle him so that he can hear his heart beat. And so, with finger on trigger and every nerve tense he waits, alarmed enough to entertain the illusion but master enough of himself not to fire till the mark is sure.

"More than he who looks for the morning!"  
Never have I realized the force of this verse as in the interminable fourteen hours of these winter nights. It is heralded now by the morning star. In the last hours of darkness, amid the summer constellations just beginning to appear, the beautiful planet rises, marvellous, resplendent. Not long after the green glow of

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dawn mantles over the east. The landscape begins to grow visible, the black spots come out in all their innocuous detail. The little groups of men return to the central post. Here the relieving squad comes up before the stars have completely disappeared and the tired watchers are free to return to the château.

If the ordeal has been hard the compensation is delightful. I have said that the degree of comfort we enjoy in the cellars of the château far exceeds any that we had in the trenches. In these subterranean quarters, completely hidden from the enemy, nothing prevents us from burning as many candles as we like. The village cellars provide us with all the coal we need; its haylofts are still full of beautiful sheaves of unthreshed grain, just as they were stacked in midsummer last. By means of the little lake in the park close at hand we are able to keep at least comfortably clean. With these simple necessities attended to we have been able to make ourselves perfectly at home in the great stone vaults of the ruined mansion.

Here in the first hour after dawn the scene is most animated and picturesque. One by one the *petits postes* return. The men throw down their sacks and by candle light arrange their places for the day and hang up their rifles and equipment. The long, nervous tension finds

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relief in a hubbub of conversation. "Did you fire?" "What did the volley mean at such a place and such a time?" A hundred questions pass as comrades reassembling seek to piece together the incidents of the night. Perhaps we ourselves have had a patrol out, and the adventures of these men are eagerly sought after and listened to.

Meanwhile the distribution of food takes place. A hot sup of coffee awaits the soldiers returning from *petit poste* in the morning. The soldier also "touches" his day's rations of wine, which, heated with a little sugar, makes an excellent sleeping potion. But most precious is the little measure of amber "taffia," or sweet rum, that is doled out only in the trenches and at the front. There is nothing like it for reviving the spirits after a night in the cold. A delicious languor steals through the limbs. Gradually the conversation subsides. One by one the candles are blown out. The soldier lays out his sleeping place carefully, lingers over his preparations, so as to know in its fulness of sensual delight the bliss of falling to sleep.

How insipid beside it seem all the refinements of comfort that peace permits! Though we return to them once more we will never think without fondness of the luxury it was in these days of strenuous toil and robust health to lie



## LETTERS AND DIARY

down after a night's watch, in the straw covered cellar bottom of our ruined château.

Life, then, in C—— is infinitely more picturesque, more interesting, and more comfortable than life in the trenches, which is the lot of by far the greater part of the troops along the present battle front. What it gains in these respects, however, it loses in excitement. The village itself is without strategic importance, so that the likelihood of an attack en masse at this point is less than at most others. The German position on the plateau above is so strong that, on the one hand, they have no reason to want to better it here, and, on the other hand, the French have more advantageous things to do than to risk a frontal assault.

Their lines at this point, then, are little more than the maintenance of contact with those of the enemy, their real defensive works, in case of need, being well in the rear. This ground has not been very closely contested and there is plenty of latitude to circulate in between. Confined to the underground shelters during the day by the artillery that thunders continually all around, yet little parties are free to go out at night and pursue more primitive and more exciting methods of warfare. If prolonged inaction becomes too exasperating there is always this nocturnal man hunting to break the monotony

## ALAN SEEGER

and no lack of volunteers for it. The simplest form of it is what we call "shooting up a *petit poste*."

Under the big pines in the château park we left a little mound and cross the first time we returned from C——. In modern warfare, where the chances for individual prowess are so reduced, one must give credit to the man who can achieve it one way or another, even if he be an enemy. And it was a little *coup d'audace*, well conceived and well executed, that cost us the life of our corporal the first night at the château.

The third guard had just gone on. Two sentinels were placed at a point in the wall where the breach made by a shell had been rudely barricaded. Enough of the hole was left open to command a view of the hillside approaches by which an attack might be delivered, but of the ground immediately on the other side nothing at all. The moon had just risen.

The sentinels had hardly been on long enough to reconnoitre their post when a grenade fell at their very feet. The fuse sputtered a second and went out without explosion. A bolt out of the blue could not have astonished the two men more. With sickening certainty the realization came upon them that the enemy had approached without their knowledge and were

## LETTERS AND DIARY

standing there two yards away without their being able to strike a blow in self-defence.

It was a moment for quick decision. Yet no course of action that presented itself seemed very satisfactory. To fire was useless, for no possible angle commanded the ground just behind the wall. The call to arms might have precipitated the danger, which still hanging in suspense offered a better opportunity for over-coming. Leaving his comrade at the breach, therefore, the mobile sentry ran down to the *petit poste*, which was only about fifty yards along the walk, and called up the corporal of the guard, warning him of what had occurred.

A little incredulous, the old soldier buckled on his equipment, took his rifle, and preceding the sentinel, walked up the path toward the barricade. Before he had time to arrive another fuse appeared spinning over the wall at the same spot. Realizing the danger, he cried out to the sentinel who had remained, to save himself. He had hardly spoken when the bomb burst with a terrific explosion. Turning toward the *petit poste* the corporal shouted "*Aux armes!*" These were his last words. Almost simultaneously with the explosion of the grenade the enemy burst in the barricade, fired down through the smoke, and were off again before the bewildered men inside had time to answer. They

## ALAN SEEGER

shot well, for almost with the first ball the old veteran of Morocco and Tonkin fell, struck in the temple, and never moved again.

That night there was not much difference at *petit poste* between the two hours on guard and the two hours off. Every one was on the alert, keyed up with apprehension. But nothing happened, as indeed there was no reason to suppose that anything would. Only about midnight, from far up on the hillside, a diabolical cry came down, more like an animal's than a man's, a blood-curdling yell of mockery and exultation.

In that cry all the evolution of centuries was levelled. I seemed to hear the yell of the warrior of the stone age over his fallen enemy. It was one of those antidotes to civilization of which this war can offer so many to the searcher after extraordinary sensations.

## V

FEBRUARY 17-MARCH 24, 1915

The deadlock. A narrow escape. Varying types of légionnaires. A promenade. Manœuvres. The "Marseillaise."

### TO HIS MOTHER

February 17, 1915.

You are quite wrong about my not realizing what I was going into when I enlisted. I had not been living for two years in Europe without coming to understand the situation very well and I was under no illusion that the conflict which was to decide the fate of empires and remake the map of Europe would be a matter of a few months. I knew that it would be a fight to the finish, just as our Civil War was. The conflagration, far from diminishing, seems to be spreading. The lull during the winter has allowed each side on this front to fortify itself so strongly that, in my opinion, the deadlock here is permanent. On the Eastern front the Russians under French direction may be able to accomplish something, but so far the Germans seem to have had all the best of it. The easiest solution to see is the entrance of

## ALAN SEEGER

Italy into the hostilities, which might have the same effect as Roumania's action in the Balkan War. But personally I can see no end at present. It will probably come about through influences other than military and such as are quite unforeseen now. At all events I do not expect to be liberated this year. . . .

Our Jan. 20 rumor of going to Orléans evaporated into thin air. Now it is Feb. 27 to Vincennes. Someone has suggested that they really meant Feb. 29th. But I do hope we shall have a little change of air soon. Will stop now for it is hard writing amid a Babel of conversation.

### TO HIS FATHER

February 26, 1915.

We have been here for six days in the trenches, out beyond the ruined village of C—— and half way up the hill to the enemy's lines. It is quite the most advanced post we have held so far. We are not in fear of an attack here but the danger from patrols out looking for trouble has kept us on the alert these last nights. Guard all night, sleep all day,—that has been the programme. The moon has made the strain much less than it would have been had the nights been dark. These advanced posts are really the least dangerous, for one is not exposed to the artillery fire, can sleep all day in peace, or,

## LETTERS AND DIARY

standing at the door of the dugout, watch the shells raising the mischief with the lines in the rear.

I was shot a few days ago coming in from sentinel duty. I exposed myself for about two seconds at a point where the communication ditch is not deep enough. One of the snipers who keep cracking away with their Mausers at any one who shows his head came within an ace of getting me. The ball just grazed my arm, tore the sleeve of my capote and raised a lump on the biceps which is still sore, but the skin was not broken and the wound was not serious enough to make me leave the ranks.

The Germans are marvellous. You hear their rifles only a few hundred metres off, you feel them about you all the time, and yet you can never see them. Only last night when the moon set behind the crest, it silhouetted the heads of two sentinels in their big trench on top.

Rumors continue to circulate about our going to be relieved and sent to a third line position for a while for a rest. It is four months now that we have been on the firing line,—four months with the noise of the cannon continually in our ears. The latest is that the whole 18th Army Corps, of which we are a unit, is to be replaced by a division of the new English troops. I shall like a little change, but I am becoming resigned

## ALAN SEEGER

to this life and accept with equanimity anything that comes along. I see no end to the thing; it may go on for years. . . .

(On back of picture postcard showing French infantry crossing C——)

March 3, 1915.

Here is the way we look marching, *l'arme à la bataille*. After six days *repos* we are going back again to the trenches tonight. In the course of a few weeks we expect to be reviewed by General Joffre, after which we shall probably go back to a second-line position for a rest. There is no chance of serious work before this time. We are just night watchmen at present, which does not please me, but which ought to comfort Mother.

## TO HIS MOTHER

March 12, 1915.

From today on, no more letters nor correspondence of any kind goes out until further notice. As this rule seems to apply to all regiments, it is probably motivated by military reasons. But if it were caused by nothing except a disgraceful article like that of ——'s that you sent me it would not be too severe. I should not think that I would need to tell you that that article is simply the low joke of a mind that thinks it funny to tell lies. If his lies did nothing worse



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than belittle his comrades who are here for motives that he is unable to conceive, it would be only dishonorable. But when it comes to throwing discredit on the French government that in all its treatment of us has been generous beyond anything that one would think possible, it is too shameful for any words to characterize. This man like many others of his type was long ago eliminated from our ranks, for a person buoyed up by no noble purpose is the first to succumb to the hardships of the winter that we have been through. A miserable weakling, incapable of feeling any generous emotion or conceiving any noble ideal, among the first to surrender in the face of suffering, he gives full rein to his perverted American sense of humor now that he can warm his feet amid the comforts of civilization again and it is his comrades who remain in the face of danger and suffering that must bear the odium that an act like that will throw on the name "American" as soon as it is brought to the notice of the authorities.

I should long ago have pulled strings to get into another regiment were it not, as I say and as I expected, that the winter's trials have pretty well weeded out the objectionable specimens and that the dépôts have sent us up to replace them men that are men and an honor to fight beside. . . . We have many Belgians with

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us here. Some French boys came up with the last reinforcement who were to commence their service this year or next and who were caught in conquered provinces when the Prussians came in. One was a prisoner in Lunéville three weeks until the French came back and drove out the invaders. Another was the youngest of six sons in a little town near Valenciennes. His five brothers were mobilized at the beginning of the war. When the Germans entered his village he was taken prisoner with all the other young men of military age and made to dig trenches for his captors. He managed to escape one night in the fog and cross the lines. There was nothing left for him but to engage in the Legion, for all his papers were lost. His mother and father remain behind in the village which is still in the hands of the Germans. If you can figure to yourself that mother, whose six sons are in the French army, not one of whom she has had any news from since August, you will have some idea of what is being gone through with over here. . . .

### TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

ON THE AISNE, March 24, 1915.

Among so many hours in the soldier's life that modern warfare makes monotonous and unromantic there come those too when the heart ex-

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pands with accesses of enthusiasm that more than compensate for all his hardships and suffering. Such was the afternoon of the review we passed the other day before the General of our army corps.

All the morning in the hayloft of our cantonment we labored cleaning from rifle and equipment, clothes and person, their evidence of the week in the trenches from which we had just returned. At noon under the most beautiful of spring skies we marched out of the village two battalions strong.

It was pleasant this little promenade, to escape for a while from the narrow circumscription to which we are so strictly confined and get a glimpse of the outer world again from which we have been so long and so completely isolated. Here the littlest things were novel and charming—to pass through new landscapes and villages, to look on women and children again, to see automobiles and get a whiff of gasoline that has the strongest power of evoking associations and bringing back the life that we have left so far, far behind. In contrast with the sinister lifelessness and suspense that reigns along the front, here, as soon as one is out of the zone of artillery fire, all is bustle and busy operations. Along the roads were the camps of the engineers and dépôts filled with material

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for defence and military works—piles of lumber, pontoon bridges in sections, infinite rolls of barbed wire, thousands of new picks and shovels neatly laid out, that raised groans from the men as they passed, for Cæsar's remark about the spade having won him more than the sword holds curiously true in the Gallic wars of today, at least so far as our experience has gone.

The roads were teeming with life, lumbering wagons and mule trains mingling with thundering motor lorries and Paris auto buses in the immense work of *ravitaillement*, motor cyclists whizzing back and forth with despatches, chic officers lounging back in the depths of luxurious limousines that were once the pride of the boulevards. Whereas on the firing line each unit has a sense of terrible detachment, here we could feel reassuringly the nation working behind us, the tightened sinews of that great, complex system of which we are but the ultimate points of pressure in the mighty effort it is making.

For fifteen kilometers or so we marched back over hill and vale, singing the *chansons de route* of the French soldier—along poplar lined canals where the big *péniches* are stalled, through picturesque villages where the civilians, returned to their reconquered territory, came to their doors

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and greeted us as we passed. Once we passed a group of German prisoners working on the roads. They looked neat and well cared for and took goodnatureedly enough the stream of banter as we marched by.

On the sunny plateau we were joined by the two relief battalions of the regiment that holds the sector to our left, and all were drawn up on the plain in columns of sections by four, a fine spectacle. We had not waited long when the General appeared down the road. He was superbly mounted, was followed by a dragoon bearing the tricolor on his lance and an escort of about a dozen horsemen. Four thousand bayonets flashed in the air as he rode by. Then the band struck up the march of the Second Chasseurs and under the mounted figure, silhouetted on a little knoll, we paraded by to its stirring strains. At the same time, with a great fracas, a big, armed monoplane rose from the fields nearby and commenced circling overhead to protect us from the attack of any hostile aircraft to which our serried ranks offered so tempting a mark.

Again we manœuvred in position and while the *états-majors* were conversing we stacked rifles, laid down our sacks and broke ranks. I took the occasion to seek out a soldier of the —*ème* and learn something of the kind of life

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they are leading on the plateau to our left. It is much more thrilling than ours apparently. The position is one of considerable strategic importance, so that the lines run within a stone's throw of each other. Sapping and mining go on incessantly. The noise of rifle firing never stops up there on the crest, and the nights are lit up continually with the glare of magnesium rockets. As if the menace of having the trench blown up at any moment under their feet was not trial enough, the proximity of the lines at this point subject the French soldiers to the fire of the "minenwerfer," or bomb thrower, those engines of destruction that were one of the several novelties that German prevision introduced into the present war.

The projectiles, as I understand it, are thrown from a spring gun, and not by explosive force, so that there is no explosion on their leaving the cannon. A sentinel with a whistle stands in the French line; whenever he sees one of these bombs arrive he gives the signal and anybody that is outside in the trenches dives into the nearest shelter at hand till the terrific explosion that they produce is past. Fortunately the fire of these machines cannot be trained with much accuracy.

I asked this soldier if they had been attacked lately and he described to me their last engage-

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ment, a typical assault in the desperate kind of struggle that goes on at these points of close contact along the front. A ditch has been dug previously to the very edge of our lines of barbed wire. For hours before the attack is to be delivered the trenches are deluged with artillery fire so intense that the French are unable to man their first line defences, but must remain back in the communicating galleries waiting the decisive moment.

Suddenly the guns are silent and simultaneously the enemy pours out of the ditch forty, thirty yards away. Some carry wire cutters, others hold the rifle in the left hand and with the right shower the trenches with grenades that they draw from sacks slung over the shoulder. The French rush to their *crénaux*. The roar of rifle and machine gun fire bursts out, and a brief, ferocious struggle ensues, which is simply a question of the speed and number of balls that can be discharged in a given number of seconds and the speed and number of men that in the same time can be rushed against the position.

The attack in question was a complete failure and only resulted in piling higher the heaps of dead that lie where they fell in the continuous battle that at this point has been going on now for six months, with alternations of success that

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in no case can be estimated in more than fractions of a hundred meters.

Before I had time to gather details of this affair from my comrade of the —*ème* the order “Sac au dos” ran through the ranks. “Baïonnette au canon!” “Presentez—armes!” went from captain to captain. Again the flash of the 4,000 bayonets. And while the battalions stood there, silent, motionless, the band broke out into the “Marseillaise.”

At the first bars of the familiar strains even the horses felt the wave of emotion that rippled over the field and whinnied in accompaniment. There was something sublime about it there in such a place and under such circumstances. Unconsciously our lips framed the words of the wonderful song. Instinctively our eyes turned to the north. There on the furthest ramparts of the bare hills was the faint white line that marked the enemy's trenches, and two hundred, one hundred, fifty yards below, our own, where the comrades of our alternating battalions were even then engaged in the grim conflict—pressing always on, desperately, determinedly, heroically.

Quoi, ces cohortes étrangères  
Feraient la loi dans nos foyers!

How marvellously every phrase of the song of 1792 applied to the situation of 1915!



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Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes  
Mugir ces féroces soldats ?

The crisis was the same, the passion the same !  
May our hearts in the hour when the supreme demand is to be made on us be fired with the same enthusiasm that filled them as we stood there on the sunny plateau listening to the Battle Hymn of the Army of the Rhine !

All were in high spirits as we marched home that evening. We took a short cut, cross-country, for it was already getting dark enough to traverse without danger the field where we passed a while exposed to the distant artillery. The last glow of sunset shone down the gray valley, illumining with a brazen lustre the windings of the river as we tramped back over the pontoon bridge and into cantonment again. Something breathed unmistakably of spring and the eve of great events.

And that night in our candle-lit loft we uncorked bottles of bubbling champagne. Again the strains of the noble hymn broke spontaneously from our lips. And clinking our tin army cups, with the spell of the afternoon still strong upon us, we raised them there together, and we too drank to "the day."

## VI

APRIL 15—APRIL 28, 1915

Rousseau's "Confessions." Routine of the trenches. Work and exercises at the rear. Night patrol. Death between the lines. German letters. Enemies' courtesies.

### TO HIS SISTER

(Written in pencil on the fly leaves of "Les Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau," Genève, MDCCLXXXII.)

April 15, 1915.

We have just come back from six days in C—— where we were *cantonnés* in the caves of the *petit château* that I described in my last letter in the *Sun*. We put in a very pleasant week here,—nine hours of guard at night in our outposts up on the hillside; in the daytime sleep, or foraging in the ruined villages, loafing in the pretty garden of the *château* or reading up in the library. We have cleaned this up now, and it is an altogether curious sensation to recline here in an easy-chair, reading some fine old book, and just taking the precaution not to stay in front of the glassless windows through which the sharpshooters can snipe at you from their posts in the thickets on the

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slopes of the plateau, not six hundred metres away. Sometimes our artillery opens up and then you lay down your book for a while and, looking through a peek-hole, watch the 75's and 120's throw up fountains of dirt and débris all along the line of the enemy's trenches.

Here is a volume from the library. I hope it will become one of the treasures on your shelves. It must be a very early if not the first edition of the "Confessions." You see it is only the first half, published probably before the work was completed. I have never read the "Confessions" except desultorily, but I am very fond of the "Promenades," which you will also find here, especially the fifth, about the Ile St. Pierre.

Spring has come here at last and we are having beautiful weather. I am going in swimming in the Aisne this afternoon for the first time. In fine health and spirits. . . .

### TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

ON THE AISNE, April 28, 1915.

I have delayed writing in the hope that something would happen here exciting enough to make really interesting reading. The London *Times* brings vivid accounts of the fighting at Neuve Chapelle and the copies of the *Matin* and *Journal* have personal narratives of the men

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who saw action in the Woëvre and in Champagne. Besides these, full of the real flavor of battle, what is there for one to say who belongs to those units that have only been waiting inactive, preparing for the great events that advancing spring ought to be bringing nearer and nearer?

Yet on the other hand these units form really the great majority of the forces now on the front, as the scantiness of the official communiqués readily shows, and a description of our life during this interlude may have the interest at least of being typical of that of most of our several million other French and English comrades.

My Servian friend was telling me last night how at one time in his country's history there was a class of soldiers who remained continually mobilized on the frontier, always on a war footing ready to defend their land. These were the Granichari, around whom popular imagination has woven a whole cycle of poetry and romance. By means of signal fires they gave warning of the 'Turks' approach. As we stood on guard back in the reserve trenches, alert for the fusillade that would mean the calling to arms of our company, it seemed to me that much the same thing was the case in France to-day. Only, whereas in old Servia these de-

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fenders were a picked corps of men, here it is practically the entire able bodied male population who make a living wall across the country that they are there to protect or perish for.

In this line our situation is about as agreeable as is consistent with a state of war, which indeed, we are often able almost to forget. Our earlier discomforts were largely due to ignorance and an inevitable inability to adapt ourselves to the conditions of a kind of warfare that even to the old soldiers among us was a novelty. Six months have taught us all many things; our life is now arranged with methodical regularity and proceeds along a fixed schedule.

By a system of reliefs by alternating battalions the disposition of our time is as follows: Six days in the first line trenches, six days repose in our village headquarters ten kilometers back; then six days reserve in the woods; six days again in the village, and so the routine recommences. Thus we have three distinct kinds of existence. I will give you a description of each one of these.

Of the three periods, every one of us would agree, that at the outposts is by far the pleasantest. For one thing we are fairly free from bombardment, being at a difficult angle under the enemy's crest. And even more important, we are entirely free from work. The soldier does

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not object to danger, which it is his business to face, but he does decidedly object to the hard labor incident to trench warfare, which he feels is really not his affair at all, but that of the engineer corps, whose number, however, is quite inadequate to the immensity of the task. The pleasantest of our life here is due also to the fact that our company's sector is not open country, but the ruined village that I described to you in my last letter, where we are able to provide ourselves with comforts which our comrades in the trenches must do without.

At C—— nowadays we are housed in a little building that was once the stable or garage of the *petit château*. During the night every one mounts guard in the trenches up the hill-side; in daytime the sentinel furnished by a single post is all that is necessary, making it possible for the rest of us to enjoy complete repose and freedom.

At sundown we assemble in the court of the *château* with blanket and tent cover and march out to the posts. Some of these are in a cemetery that got in the way of the flood tide of the Battle of the Aisne. The retreating Germans must have made a stand behind the mounds and grave stones, for the place has been frightfully bombarded. The shells that do not respect even the dead have shattered the monuments

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and burst open the sepulchres. Quantities of chloride of lime, liberally sprinkled about, are a remedy that is not much better than the evil, and the rats as big as rabbits that scurry under the banks and hedges and discourage one from lying down between watches make this the least desirable of all posts.

Better are the trenches further up the hill-side, where in the calm of night, disturbed only occasionally by a fusillade or the cannon's double boom, one can contemplate at his ease the vast panorama spread out below, dim under the circling stars or emerging in the pale lustre of beautiful dawns.

Further up the slope the voices of the enemy are plainly audible. Even wider to them stretch those magnificent horizons, and I often wonder with what feelings they regard them. Beyond the utmost ridges they had once penetrated, before our victory at the Marne threw them back to the bitterly contested plateau, strewing all the fields and roadsides between with their dead. There below them southward—tempting, provoking—lies expanded, almost coquettishly, the fair realm of France, and over behind the sunset hills—Paris! Violators outwitted, is it the regret of an irretrievable defeat that fills their long watches up there, or the hope of making another and more successful assault?

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All our outposts now, no less than our main lines of defence, are protected by formidable barbed wire entanglements, behind which we can rest secure from the surprises that cost us lives in the early days of the campaign. The Germans have done no less on their side. In fact night resounds with the hammering of stakes from all directions and in the quiet of his lonesome watch the sentinel imagines with amazement what will be the cost of life for either army that attempts to break through a line which seven months of continuous work have fortified with all the murderous defences that ingenuity can devise.

At 3 o'clock now the east begins to pale, and an hour later the posts can return. Picking up our blankets we hurry down the hillside, through the cemetery and back to the château on the edge of the village. An hour of animated conversation ensues as the day's distribution is made and the places laid in the straw. Then a fine siesta until the cry of "soupe" calls us all out again around 11 o'clock.

In the long afternoons no one has any desire to sleep. Warm sunshine fills the enclosed garden of the château. Here the birds are singing and the buds swelling. Shielded from the sharpshooters up the hillside, one can write, sew, clean his gun and equipment, or attend to



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the hundred little things that fill the soldier's idle hours. Or he can walk in the château through a shell hole in the wall, climb to the first floor over a staircase level with débris, and picking his way through the litter of insecure floors find out the little library, where beautiful books still line the shelves. Here he can read under the strangest conditions imaginable Rousseau's "Confessions" or Voltaire's "History of Charles XII."

On the evening of the seventh day, when we are to be relieved, we go out into the village and bring back loads of unthreshed grain that American harvesting machinery has bound into most convenient little bundles. These we strap on our sacks to take back to the village in the rear for bedding. I was curious to know the weight we carried on these marches, and finding a twenty kilo weight I balanced a plank and placed this on the other end. Sack, cartridge belt and portable pick more than tipped it up, besides which one must add rifle, two haversacks strung over each shoulder and two canteens. But such is the hardening of a winter's campaign that one can carry this load of well over sixty pounds ten kilometers (six miles) back over a sandy road with only one stop and feel none the worse for it at the end.

Our life during the six days in the rear is of a

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nature designed to counteract the effect of the six days of enforced inaction at the front. It means chiefly work and field exercises. There is always one afternoon of target practice when, after many a period in the trenches without seeing a mark, it is a pleasure to hear the Lebel speak and to get a line on one's marksmanship. In a big abandoned sugar refinery some eight or ten kilometers down the valley some fine hot showers have been arranged for all the troops in this section and a march down here with soap and towel comes on every visit to the rear and is greatly enjoyed by all.

Though these weekly returns to the rear are a relief after the strain of outpost work the element of danger is not really any further removed, for the village is well within the range of artillery fire, though hid by an intervening ridge, and shells came whistling into it occasionally, especially in reprisal for some misadventure on the firing line. Thus the depot of the regiment on our right, who had wiped out a German post a few days before, was bombarded the other evening, and the pretty village whose old Gothic church peeks over the green ridge a mile east of us was veiled for half an hour in clouds of black smoke and the dust of the explosions in the narrow streets. A chance shell that came through the roof of a building where an artillery

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regiment was cantoned in our village one night cost more lives than were lost during their whole retreat from Belgium.

The third period—that in the reserve trenches a mile back in the forest from the front line—is the six days that are looked forward to generally with least pleasure. This is because it is the duty of the companies in reserve to work on the defences and the labor is infinite. Here we live in earthen dugouts, like all the rest of the trenches, the bottom covered with straw brought from C—— and the roof made of bags heaped over with branches and dirt.

Though the week in the second line is the period of hardest work it also brings opportunities for the most excitement, for the companies in reserve are also those which furnish the night patrols of reconnaissance. *Patrouille!* How the heart beats to hear the word go round in the afternoon and to learn that one has been chosen to take part in it. To escape from the eternal confinement of the trenches, to stalk out into the perilous zone between the lines and there where death may lurk in every thicket and uncertainty encompasses one close as the night, to court danger for several hours under a fine starlit sky, this is the one breath of true romance that we get in the monotonous routine of trench warfare.

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I have always thought that in a sense this night patrol work was the most exacting on the nerves of all soldier's duties. In great actions where comrades fight elbow to elbow there are all sorts of external stimulants and supports. Each man is his neighbor's prop, there is the spoken and the unspoken encouragement, and borne up on a wave of contagious enthusiasm, individuals act no longer as such but in mass and every one is as brave as the bravest. Besides one sees clearly, knows from which direction the danger will come and pretty much what to expect, and usually has ample time to prepare himself and muster up all his forces for the shock.

To the member of the little company creeping out over a battlefield in cold blood in the dead of night, all this is lacking. From every side the menace points, behind every turn the ambush may be hidden. He has nothing to rely on but his own sang-froid. Advancing over the ground strewn with bodies he faces in every shadow the possibility of the sudden volley at point blank that will lay him cold among them. It is a kind of adventure that the true sportsman will appreciate.

We went out, fifteen men, a few nights ago to reconnoitre a new ditch that had appeared on the face of the hillside high up under the German lines. The moon in its first quarter,

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highly veiled by clouds, made the conditions good. We left about 9 o'clock, marching by twos down the wood road to C—. Once more the familiar passage through its barricaded streets, between its riddled walls and skeleton roofs and we walked on beyond and up the hill through a communication ditch to the outer trenches. Here a few brief instructions were given and the *chef de poste* was advised to tell his sentinels of our sortie and so we waded out over the barbed wire, for all the world like launching off over the surf from the security of land into the perilous unknown beyond.

The night was warm and windless. There were fruit trees all about this part of the hillside. They were clouded with bloom, reminding one of Japanese prints. But another odor as we advanced mingled with that of the blossoms, an odor that, congealed all through the winter, is becoming more and more intense and pervasive as the warm weather increases. Among the breaths of April, fragrant of love and the rebirth of life, it intrudes, the sickening antithesis—pungent, penetrating, exciting to madness and ferocity, as the other to tenderness and desire—the odor of carrion and of death.

We had not gone fifty steps when they began to appear, these disturbing relics of the great battle that terminated here on September 20

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last, when these hillsides ran with blood. From that day, when our present lines were established, not a living soul had been in this area in daylight, and the rare few who have crossed it at night have been only the fugitive patrols like our own. What wonder then if the dead lie as they fell in the fighting seven months ago. Shapeless, dark masses as one approaches them in the dim moonlight, they come out suddenly at a few steps off in their disfigured humanity, and peering down one can distinguish arms and legs and, last and most unspeakable, the features.

Single or in heaps or files they lie—in attitudes of heroism or fear, of anguish or of pity—some shielding their heads with their sacks from the hail of shrapnel, many with the little “first aid” package of bandages in their hands, with which they have tried to stanch their wounds. Frenchmen and Germans alike, rigid bundles of soaked cloth, filling the thickets, sodden into the muddy beet fields, bare and exposed around the trenches on the bleak upper slopes and amid sacks, broken guns and all the litter of the battlefield.

The sight is one which may well be unnerving the first time, but one soon gets used to it, and comes to look upon these images of death with no more emotion than on the empty cartridge cases around them—which, indeed, in a way

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they do resemble. Having served their purpose the material shell remains, while their vitality has been dispersed into the universe to enter into new combinations in that eternal conservation of energy which is the scientist's faith and that imperishability of anything that is beautiful in the human personality, which is the poet's.

In general our patrols try to avoid useless collisions, which, as the English manual puts it, "serve no good end, give rise to reprisals and disturb the main body." But of course there is always the chance of running into an enemy's party, and this not infrequently happens, as the sudden fusillades along the hillside show. If a patrol comes close and an enemy's post is alarmed they throw up a *fusée*—one of the many German innovations in this war which go to show their superior preparedness. The repeated flare of these on a dark night outlines in white fire their battle fronts across the continent.

They have perfected two varieties, both far better than our own, which appeared on this part of the front only a short while ago. One is simply a ball of magnesium or calcium light that is thrown like the ball out of a Roman candle, its brilliance beginning just as it reaches the apex of its curving flight and lasting just during its slow fall, thus lighting up all the surrounding

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country for several seconds with the most intense glare. The other is the same kind of light, only of longer duration. It is projected by a bomb thrower to that side of the zone to be examined from which the wind is blowing. At the height of about a hundred feet a little explosion lights and at the same time liberates the fire ball, which is ingeniously suspended to a little parachute. It floats therefore horizontally on the wind back over the field of danger, lasting for several minutes and illuminating the country for miles around with a brilliance in which every blade of grass can be seen. When this occurs the *patrouilleurs* flop into any shelter they can find or, lying among the dead, escape detection as best they may.

The progress of a patrol is necessarily slow and much of the time is spent flat on the ground. As one's position is often enough right next to a body, curiosity may overcome his scruples, and so he can bring back souvenirs that will the next day be the admiration of his comrades—enemy's rifles and other insignia. A notorious pilferer among us brought in five pairs of new shoes that he had found strapped to a German sack the other night.

The most interesting finds of the kind that I have seen were some letters that a man brought in a few nights ago from a German body up



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on the hill. They were postcards, dated the last of August and the first of September last. I wish I had taken them down textually so that you could share some of the emotion that was mine, contrasting with the poor shell of humanity up there in the grass these so living tokens of the ties that once bound him to earth. It was Austin Dobson's "After Sedan" exactly. The cards, that were wonderfully preserved, were addressed to a certain "Muskatier Maier, bei Strasburg, the 136th Regiment of Bavarian Infantry," if I remember correctly. They were headed "Mein Lieber Bruder," "Lieber Sohn"—simple little family messages, reflecting a father's pride, a sister's love, a mother's fears. Far away in some German village they have long since found his name in the lists of missing. But soon we will go out in the night and bury these bodies nearest our lines as a sanitary measure, and the manner of his death or the place of his nameless grave they will never know.

Patrol work is the only way of winning laurels in the absence of actual fighting, and the little parties that go out have no end of adventures that make the conversation of the camp for days to come. Seven weeks ago two Polish deserters came into the lines and gave us valuable information. That night the patrol that went out left the prisoners' menu card for that day stuck on

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the barbed wire in front of a German post. A few days ago another patrol passing the same spot found a basket in which the Germans had placed two bottles of Munich beer, a box of cigarettes, some chocolate, sandwiches and other samples of their diet, which, it must be said in justice to them, was not bad. On top were three letters addressed to us, "Dear Comrades," and couched in excellent French.

The tone of these was most polite. They said that they had been there all the winter in front of us and felt we were quite old friends now, though they had never seen any of us except at the end of bullet flight. They said that they had seen in our press reports to the effect that they were suffering from hunger and so enclosed this specimen of their daily fare to show what they were really enjoying.

The rest of the letters expressed much the same sentiments as those which are frequently shot into other parts of the French lines with bow and arrow, namely, that if we wanted peace all we had to do was to come out and sign; that England was their real enemy—why should France go on fighting and suffering terrible losses to pull England's chestnuts out of the fire? They hoped that peace would soon be signed and that a friendship and alliance would follow between France and Germany which would

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leave their hands free to deal with England, who for her selfishness and greed was really the common enemy of all mankind. They had three mobile posts up there in the woods, they said, and knew every time that we approached (which I don't believe), but did not fire, only signalled to each other and waited.

Firing as a matter of fact is becoming rarer and rarer along the line now in comparison to what it was in the winter, when Mauser and Lebel sputtered at each other all through the night. I have no doubt if we were to remain here much longer under the same conditions that there would be a kind of tacit understanding not to fire at outposts and that there would even develop neutral zones and surreptitious commerce between the sentinels, as I have heard from veterans was the case in the latter years of our civil war. For the evolution of hostility is naturally toward chivalry, not toward unmitigated ferocity.

The hymns of hate, the rancor and vindictiveness are the expressions of non-combatants whose venom has time to accrue in the quiet of studies far from the noise of the cannon. To the actual combatant the sense of the grandeur of his calling is too strong upon him to let such ignoble trivialities intrude. Without striking any the less strongly when the time comes he is yet

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ready enough to pay tribute to his enemy where  
tribute is deserved, and glad enough to be able  
to say of him as the old Spanish romancer said  
of his country's deadliest foe:

“Caballeros granadinos,  
Aunque moros, hijos d'algo.”

## VII

MAY 10-JUNE 15, 1915

The *Lusitania*. Fusées éclairantes. The coming of spring. Dangers of trench life. An impending change of scene. On the march. Ludes. Puisieulx. The Ferme d'Alger. La Pompelle. The Aisne valley. Review of the eight months on the front.

### TO HIS MOTHER

May 10, 1915.

We all had our third typhoid inoculation yesterday and every one is laid up, weak and feverish. There is a big bombardment going on up the river at Berry-au-Bac and we are all hoping not to have an alert, for it would be hard to do any work under such conditions. I do not imagine we shall have anything doing here, however, for the main operations seem to be in Flanders.

Summer has come here almost without any spring at all. The valley is very beautiful, all the orchards in bloom. Up in the woods the birds sing all day and I love to listen to the cuckoos, particularly in the early dawn at the outpost.

We have all been very excited about the news

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of the *Lusitania*. I suppose American public sentiment is terribly wrought up, but I have no hope that Washington will do anything and I was not surprised to see that Ambassador Gerard had been instructed to ask for an official report, on the basis of which a new note will be drawn up. Why in the name of all dignity does not the American government act or shut up, for the *Gazette de Cologne* explicitly states that all indignant protestations will be received with absolute coldness?

I cannot understand the American state of mind, nor why Americans have the temerity to venture into a declared war-zone, much less let their wives and children go there, when anyone with a grain of sense might have foreseen what has happened. They might just as well come over here and go out Maying in front of our barbed wire.

I think we are here in this sector for good now and no one talks any longer of repose. All the regiments around us are in just about the position where they crossed the Aisne in September, the life on the front is being admirably organized and we enjoy a degree of comfort now really inconsistent with a state of war. There are two shops in the village and we can buy practically everything we need.

## LETTERS AND DIARY

### TO THE "NEW YORK SUN"

AT THE FRENCH FRONT, May 22, 1915.

Night of violent attacks. All yesterday we listened to the hum of aeroplanes overhead and watched them cruising about amid their little satellites of shrapnel puffs as the vertical batteries bombarded them. About an hour after nightfall the firing began on a sector a few miles to our right, at first the abrupt fusillade, then the rumble of grenades, then the cannon entered into the medley, and the rattle of rifle and machine gun was completely drowned in the steady thunder of high explosives. At regular intervals a terrific explosion as a heavy piece bombarded a village behind our lines to embarrass re-enforcements coming up.

From our outpost on the hillside we had a fine view of a magnificent spectacle. The German *fusées* kept shooting up like the "flower pots" to which we are used on the Fourth of July. The French fire rockets, mounting twice as high, let out their ball of vivid light that floated on the wind a minute or so over the battlefield. Beside the white glare of the fireworks the explosions of shell and bomb are momentary pin-heads of red. A while and the lights become lurid and blurred in layers of smoke. The big guns far from the main scene of action begin

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to take up the chorus, firing on the flashes. Our own heavy batteries several kilometers back begin to thunder and we listen to the projectiles whistling overhead among the stars. . . .

Went out on guard this morning at dawn. An angle of buttercup field and forest. One would never have thought that it could be so beautiful, this world of green and blue that suddenly, almost without perceptible gradation, has succeeded the world of black and gray which has made winter so discouraging here, the air sweet with exhalations from the heavy, dew drenched grass. From the forest the sweet call of cuckoos and wood pigeons. May morning, rustle of leaves, sunshine, tranquillity. . . .

Today was the sixth and last at second line *petit poste*. Fine weather, warm and sunny. Some of the men, careless after a week without bombardment, were up on top of the turf-covered bombproof playing cards. Suddenly the distant boom of a cannon, and then, half a second later—whang! A shrapnel had burst twenty yards away in the branches of the grove that screened us from the enemy.

The sudden stampede into the dugout, then a heart-rending cry, and the frantic voices: "Pick up —! pick up —!" Two men go out, braving the momentary recurrence of the danger with that unassuming courage which is a matter



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of course in the trenches. They bring in the poor comrade, cruelly, mortally wounded. Another, less badly, has had his shoulder torn. We wait till the next shell bursts immediately overhead with a deafening crash. A man has been waiting for it, crouching in the doorway like a sprinter waiting for the signal. By the time the third shell comes he is far away in his race for the litter-bearers half a mile back. Until they arrive we who are not necessary to tend the wounded sit with downcast eyes and shaken nerves, trying not to look or listen, while six other shells in regular succession burst outside, the fragments pattering on the roof of the dugout and the acrid smell of the powder drifting inside.

This is the most distressing thing about the kind of warfare we are up against here. Never a sight of the enemy, and then some fine day when a man is almost tempted to forget that he is on the front—when he is reading or playing cards or writing home that he is in the best of health—bang! and he is carried off or mangled by a cannon fired five kilometers away. It is not glorious. The gunner has not the satisfaction of knowing that he has hit, nor the wounded at least of hitting back. You cannot understand how after months of this one longs for the day when this miserable trench warfare will

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cease and when in the *élan* of open action he can return blow for blow.

How is it that the enemy know so well our positions, for we are well hidden and they probably see no more of us than we of them? One principal way was explained to me by a friend who had visited the aviation fields a few days ago. While we take pains to keep concealed from the enemy's lines opposite, the aeroplanes are so much a matter of course that one scarcely takes the trouble to look up when the hum of a motor is heard, much less of ducking underground.

But here is a very real danger. It is not so much from the bombs that they occasionally drop on the lines and on the villages in the rear, but the observer up there with a camera of powerful telescopic lens is photographing all the time the country underneath. The film is developed that night and the prints scrutinized under a microscope. Details show up in this way that would escape the naked eye. It is thus that batteries and camps, posts and all kinds of military works are located.

The next day the gunner, in possession of the exact knowledge, can point his piece at leisure, and the moment when he thinks he can do most damage, sends us a few shells when the humor takes him and when we least expect them.

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In billets again. Was out on guard early this morning. Suppressed excitement in the little village as the streets begin to fill with officers and soldiers. Then a friend passes. "*Eh, bien! On y met,*" he calls out. Who that prides himself on his knowledge of French can translate that? It is an abbreviation for "*on met les cannes,*" which, I will probably still have to explain, means that we are going to clear out. The rumor is soon confirmed. Yes, after just seven months in this more or less tranquil sector we are actually going to get the change we have all been longing for, and on twelve hours notice too. We leave tonight. Where? Nobody knows; but nobody doubts that it is to be into the thick of it.

I should like to give you some impressions of the state of mind before going into action, but unfortunately there is no time. The sacks must be made right away. Let me only say that I am heartily glad, and this feeling is increased when the news comes that poor little —, who was wounded the other day, has died in hospital. Poor boy! It was the best thing for him.

It is good to get away from the constant danger here of dying thus ingloriously. If it must be, let it come in the heat of action. Why flinch? It is by far the noblest form in which death can come. It is in a sense almost a privilege to be

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allowed to meet it in this way. The cause is worth fighting for. If one goes it is in company with the élite of the world. *Ave atque vale!* If I write again it will no doubt be to tell you of wonderful things.

We are all in fine form, fit and eager for the assault. I think it will come soon.

*Le jour de gloire est arrivé!*

### DIARY

*May 24, 1915.*—Left Cuiry-les-Chaudardes after almost seven months on the Aisne. Were replaced by the 34<sup>ème</sup> that came over from Beau-rioux. Marched out at midnight. Stopped at dawn on the roadside on the plateau of Merval and had breakfast. Waited here for the auto-buses. They arrived by hundreds about noon and, embarking, we came back over about the same route we traversed in October. Got out and had supper in a spot that looked out over the plains of Champagne, a wonderful picture, with Reims and the Cathedral in the distance. Marched from there by night to Ludes, where we passed the night in the stables of a Mumm *établissement*. Leave tonight for the trenches.

*Puisieulx, May 25.*—Spent a pleasant day in Ludes. It is like getting back into civilization

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again after seven months in the woods on the Aisne,—plenty of civilians, women and children, stores open. *Rassemblement* at sundown. Marched here over the plains and are to spend six days here in third line and then go up to the first, near the Ferme d'Alger. An important sector with the trenches very close. The regiment has been broken up, it seems, and distributed along this part of the front. Our battalion, at least, (which is generally recognized to be the best) is detached and is alternating with the 38th battalion of *Chasseurs à pied*. Beautiful spring weather. Glad to be in Champagne.

*May 29.*—After some days of *repos* in Puisieulx, came up to the first line trenches yesterday evening. Full moon rising. Passed through a romantic forest, then out over the open fields to the Vesle. Crossed over an improvised bridge, then passed the canal and the railroad tracks. Here the *boyau* began. A fine piece of work, seven feet deep in the chalky ground and wide enough to walk in with ease. Came to first line which is very elaborately organized, and went out immediately on *petit poste*. Only a hundred yards from the German line. A great deal of firing at night. Both sides do plenty of bomb-throwing, but very little artillery fire here. Today went out to the outpost also

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from 4 to 12 m. We are right on the national road from Reims to Châlons, at a point near the fort de La Pompelle, between the Chasseurs and the 411e *de ligne*. The *génie* are doing some sapping here; they have made a lateral gallery some distance out to intercept any German saps, in case they try to repeat the manoeuvre that cost them so dear at the Ferme d'Alger a few months ago. Here they exploded mines under our trenches and occupied the crater, but later were chased out by the *Tirailleurs Algériens*, since when the place has remained in our possession. The lines here are so near that the two sides can talk to each other easily. We told them a few nights ago that Italy had declared war and they yelled back: "Yes, but against you!" Won't they be furious when they learn the truth!

*June 3.*—Are spending four days of repose in the *cagnats* on the railroad tracks. The canal with its high poplars where the wind rustles all day long is very pretty. It is pleasant here where we are in close contact with the French soldiers, the 38th Chasseurs, the 86th Territorials and the 411 *de ligne*. Not much likelihood of action, for all that is happening now is around Arras. Here the 1er *Etranger* was engaged in the charge at Neuville-Saint-Vaast

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and suffered heavy losses. Rockwell, who was transferred to the 1er a few months ago, took part in this affair and was wounded in the thigh.

*June 10.*—Spent six days in second line on the railroad tracks, then came back to a sector on the first, near the Auberge d'Alger. I went up yesterday and looked at the famous *enton-noir*. It is a huge crater, in the depths of which lie buried who knows how many Germans, Sénégalais and Algériens. The Chasseurs have strongly organized the defenses here, which form a veritable little fortress on a height of ground that completely dominates the Germans. They have pushed in very close however, at one point less than 100 meters. There is a continuous fusillade at night and the echoes that crackle back from the woodsides and distant hills, in all kinds of fantastic modulations, never have time to die into a complete calm. Once in a while a German cries out—"Hey—Français—kaput, kaput." Then piquant dialogues begin, either in French or German, for not only are the two sides near enough to talk back and forth with ease but we can hear them talking among themselves and playing their harmonicas and accordions, a kind of music which the German soldiers seem very fond of. From our little height we can see the towers of the Cathedral

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of Reims. Smoke often comes out of the chimneys of the factories, operating under the fire of the German heavy guns that let scarcely a day pass without throwing shells into the unfortunate city.

The French offensive around Arras seems to be extending to the south and there have been attacks the last few days at Tracy-le-Mont, between Compiègne and Soissons, and at Ville-aux-Bois, which is only a few kilometers to the right of Craonne. This may explain the surprising announcement circulating this morning, that we are to leave again tonight for a *destination inconnue*. This pleases me. After the long *séjour* at Cuiry-les-Chaudardes and Craonnelle, one craves a little variety, and the more the better. These changes are exciting, for no one knows, when we leave, where we are going to end. All kinds of rumors start. Here are some of our destinations as different rumors have them on different authorities this morning: the Dardanelles, the Sucreries de Souchez, Hurtebise, la Ville-aux-Bois and Châlons. *Vamos á ver*.

*June 13.*—Left La Pompelle at midnight and walked in the early summer dawn to la Neuville, behind Verzy. Spread blankets in a field, had coffee, lay down and had a good siesta.



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Automobiles arrived at noon. Crowded into them, eighteen men to a wagon. Started back west and soon came into same road that we had walked over in October when our squad was escort for the *convoi*. Held this to Fismes and so back again to the plateau of Merval. Here *sac au dos* and we marched down to Œuilly on the Aisne, where we went into billets for the night.

Had a fine swim in the Aisne yesterday afternoon, then early soup, *rassemblement*, and we started off again. Turned up the Laon road and through Moulins, came to Paissy on the plateau, where we relieved the *6e de ligne*, who have been here since October. Picturesque village built along the road that crowns a deep horse-shoe ravine. Bottom filled with poppy fields, tumbling stream, distant vistas. Back in the heroic battle field of the Aisne, with its ruins in the villages and ancient trenches in the fields. Some of the *18e de ligne* are also billeted here and it was they who suffered so badly in the German attack on January 25th. I talked with men who were in this affair. It seems the Germans, the morning after the attack, paraded their prisoners on the crest opposite the French.

The second and fourth companies went into the trenches some 1,500 meters beyond. Evidently they made too much noise making the

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*relevé*, for the Germans began launching bombs, which killed four men and wounded several others, including the captain of the second company. We stayed in the village in reserve.

Our section was on guard. Mine fell in the night from 12 to 2. Kept watch at a point on the edge of the plateau right beside the emplacement of a 75 which was cleverly concealed. An artilleryman of the 14<sup>e</sup> slept in a hole in the ground near by. *Consigne* to wake him if anything happened. Very quiet in comparison with Champagne, where there was a continual fusillade at night and where we amused ourselves in the daytime shooting through the *créneaux*. Those shots that were fired, however, whistled uncomfortably near the sentinels' ears, cracked in the branches and fell in the ground near by.

The villages in this part of the country are very old, built in stone blocks taken from the famous quarries of the Aisne. These are all about here, immense grottoes in the solid face of the hillside. It was in one of these that the two companies of the 18<sup>e</sup> were trapped while sheltering themselves from the bombardment.

*June 15.*—Came up to the reserve trenches a mile northwest of Paissy on the plateau. Here the English fought in September—it was about

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the extremity of their right wing—and there are many graves of British soldiers in the fields all about. We are at the head of a deep ravine which commands a pretty triangular vista of the valley of the Aisne through a frame of foliage and of the plateau beyond. Hot, sunny summer weather. A lazy period of almost complete repose. The artillery does a little close range work occasionally, but otherwise the utmost calm prevails here. They call this war!

It seems we are going to make another move tomorrow. They say we are going back to Aï, near Epernay, where we shall form part of a division of reserve. This news pleases me immensely. If true it means almost certainly that we shall have henceforth no lack of action and movement and variety. These troops will probably be thrown in to attack at any point along the front where they are needed.

Here then is a fitting place to close this first chapter of my experiences. That we have been eight months on the front without having once attacked or been attacked need not cause any surprise, for a great part of the troops now in the trenches are in the same position. It seems to have been pure hazard that an easy sector fell to us, just as it was good luck that our

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battalion and Bataillon D had the low sector at Craonnelle, whereas F and G, who were on the crest of Ouldres, suffered almost daily losses during the winter from bombardment. The winter in the trenches was certainly hard, but it is already far enough away for the miseries to fade out of the picture, and for the rest to become tinged with the iridescence of romance. What is Virgil's line about the pleasure it will be sometime to recall having once done these things? I have known that all along, through no matter what fatigue and monotony. Never have I regretted doing what I am doing nor would I at this moment be anywhere else than where I am. I pity the poor civilians who shall never have seen or known the things that we have seen and known. Great as are the pleasures that they are continuing to enjoy and that we have renounced, the sense of being the instrument of Destiny is to me a source of greater satisfaction.

Nothing but good can befall the soldier, so he plays his part well. Come out of the ordeal safe and sound, he has had an experience in the light of which all life thereafter will be three times richer and more beautiful; wounded, he will have the esteem and admiration of all men and the approbation of his own conscience; killed, more than any other man, he can face

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the unknown without misgiving—that is, so long as Death comes upon him in a moment of courage and enthusiasm, not of faltering or of fear; and that this may, if necessary, be the case, I shall strain all my will the day that it comes round to our turn to go into the furnace. I have a feeling that that day is near at hand.

## VIII

JUNE 18—AUGUST 8, 1915

**Magneux.** Châlons-sur-Vesle. The first line trenches. A quiet sector. German rejoicings over the news from Russia. *Salut* in the village church. The MS at Bruges. Permission in Paris. Back to the trenches. Belgians and Russians leave the Legion. Departure for Haute-Saône. Journey in cattle cars. Vesoul. Plancher-Bas. "Le Cheval Blanc." Pleasant days in the rear. A review at Chaux-la-Chapelle. The "nouba." General Lyautey. A walk with Victor Chapman. For love of France. The tragedies of the village.

### TO HIS MOTHER

MAGNEUX, June 18, 1915.

Received your letters and clippings yesterday on the march. I am not thinking of anything else but the business in hand, and if I write, it is only to divert the tedium of the trenches and to get a little intellectual exercise of which one stands so much in need now. You must not be anxious about my not coming back. The chances are about ten to one that I will. But if I should not, you must be proud, like a Spartan mother, and feel that it is your contribution to the triumph of the cause whose righteousness you feel so keenly. Everybody should

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take part in this struggle which is to have so decisive an effect, not only on the nations engaged but on all humanity. There should be no neutrals but everyone should bear some part of the burden. If so large a part should fall to your share, you would be in so far superior to other women and should be correspondingly proud. There would be nothing to regret, for I could not have done otherwise than what I did and I think I could not have done better. Death is nothing terrible after all. It may mean something even more wonderful than life. It cannot possibly mean anything worse to the good soldier. So do not be unhappy but no matter what happens walk with your head high and glory in your large share of whatever credit the world may give me. . . .

### DIARY

*Magneux, June 19, 1915.*—Left the reserve trenches above Paissy yesterday at 2 o'clock. Relieved by the 218<sup>e</sup>. Marched down the picturesque ravine through Moulins into the valley of the Aisne. Crossed the river at Hautes-Rives, then past the sugar refinery where we have been coming to bathe during the winter. Sunny, very hot afternoon. Came pretty near to dropping on the climb up to the plateau of Merval. Stopped halfway up and had supper

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in the fields. Then continued through Merval and Baslieux here to Magneux, near Fismes, where we have spent the night. Many civilians here and conditions apparently quite normal. Saw electric lights and railroad trains for the first time in eight months. German aeroplanes have been dropping bombs on Fismes regularly of late and a while ago killed seventeen soldiers *d'un seul coup*. Our protection against aeroplane attacks is very inferior to the Germans', whose special aeroplane guns shoot very accurately, whereas our ordinary field pieces, turned on so difficult a mark, go very wide.

*Châlons-sur-Vesle, June 20.*—Left Magneux at 3 o'clock this morning. Marched down the *route nationale* through Jouchery and Muizon here to Châlons-sur-Vesle, where we arrived at 8.30. Fine summer weather; stood the march well and enjoyed it. A fugitive glimpse of the cathedral towers. I am afraid the Germans are going to bombard Reims and the cathedral as a reprisal for the recent French air raid on Carlsruhe. This morning as we left Magneux we saw a Taube and a few minutes later heard the explosions of the bombs it let fall on Fismes. Why can't the French stop this?

Do not know how long we are going to stay here or whither we are going. Would that



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we could take part in an assault on the Fort de Brimont, where the Germans have placed the heavy guns that fire on Reims and the cathedral. Fitting death for an artist, to fall avenging this outrage to Art in one of its most perfect manifestations.

*Appel* this evening at nine. Took a solitary walk about a mile out of the village. Found a high spot that commanded a wonderful view toward the east, with Reims and the cathedral about 10 kilometers off and beyond Nogent and the heights from which the enemy dominate it. Very beautiful country. The first harvest has been reaped and the tan of the haystacks and stubble and the scarlet of the poppy-fields mingles with the fresh green of the early summer landscape. In the distance could be heard the rifle shots and the occasional booming of cannon, but here all is peaceful and quite normal. The women and children have all returned, the men work in the fields, the church-bells toll the hours and quarters. Sat for a long while looking eastward, till the city and the roofless cathedral faded out in the twilight and the waxing moon brightened in the south. Tomorrow we go to the trenches.

*June 23.*—Came up to the first line trenches at sundown day before yesterday. Marched

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single file through what seemed miles of *boyau*. An immense labor has been spent upon these long zig-zag ditches, often six and seven feet deep in the chalk. Went out immediately on *poste d'écoute* until midnight. A very quiet sector here, with practically no artillery nor rifle fire. There seems to be a kind of *entente* not to shoot on either side. But the reason may be that the trenches here are on a level plain and the tall grass makes each line invisible to the other. The guards, in the daytime, watch by means of a periscope, through which, raised about a yard above the parapet, the white line of upturned chalk can be seen over the tops of the meadow grass and flowers some two or three hundred yards away. We are about four miles up the line from Reims, about a mile out in the plain from the *route nationale* where the kitchens are. In front of us is the Fort de Brimont. We have a fine unobstructed side view of the cathedral. The chimneys of the city are smoking. This sector is really too quiet,—it is a place for territorials. I do not believe we shall be here long.

*June 26.*—On *poste d'écoute* last night from 8 to 12. Great celebration among the Germans opposite,—drunken songs and uproar. Today came the news of the Russian evacuation of

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Lemberg. That was the reason then. This success of the German armies is of an importance that all the depreciation of the Allied press cannot serve to blind one to. It looks as if munitions were seriously lacking in Russia. I seem to see now the reason for Hindenburg's raid into Courland and the capture of Libau. In conjunction with the present advance in Galicia, this makes a more and more dangerous salient of the Russian central front in Poland. I believe that the Germans will cut in now from north and south and that Warsaw will be theirs within a month. If they will not then have utterly destroyed the Russian armies, they will at least have so far paralyzed them that they will be incapable of any serious offensive for many months to come. Entrenching therefore on a line that they will be at liberty to choose, the Germans will leave on the eastern front just sufficient troops to cope with the demoralized enemy and transport the bulk of their mighty offensive power, flushed with victory, either to the Italian or more likely to the French front.

It would seem as though now, if ever, were the moment for our great offensive here, for the trenches opposite are probably denuded more than they will ever be at any time to come. But the battle around Arras has been raging now for a month or more and yet we seem

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unable to make any serious progress. Optimism does not run very high among us these days and it is not encouraged by the singing and noisy confidence of the enemy opposite.

*Merfy, June 29.*—Rumor has it that we are not to be here long, but will make another change of sectors even before our next trip to the trenches. Another winter campaign that we have all been dreading has now become a certainty, and the English papers are not hesitating to talk about the postponement of the Allied offensive until next spring. The Kaiser, however, has made a speech in Berlin, saying that the war would be over before winter.

### TO HIS MOTHER

July 3, 1915.

We have been spending six days in a pleasant little village here behind the lines. Life has resumed much of its normal aspect. Every evening there is *salut* in the old church and on Sundays mass. The nave is always crowded with soldiers, even though there be few real believers among them. But these services, where the voices of the soldiers mingle in the responses with those of the women and little children of the village, are always peculiarly moving to me. The Catholic religion, idealizing, as it

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does, the spirit of sacrifice, has an almost universal appeal these days.

Things don't seem to be going very well for the Allies of late. More discouraging to me than the Russian defeats in Galicia is the check of our offensive around Arras, which without doubt was not a local action intended only to gain a strategic position, but was an attempt to break the German lines, deliver Lille, and determine a German retreat from the north of France. In this larger end we seem to have failed. The first regiment of the *Légion Etrangère* led this attack very gallantly and were almost annihilated. I have friends who were wounded in this affair and I envy them, for we are still condemned to the same old inaction. . . .

Had I the choice I would be nowhere else in the world than where I am. Even had I the chance to be liberated; I would not take it. Do not be sorrowful then. It is the shirkers and slackers alone in this war who are to be lamented. The tears for those who take part in it and who do not return should be sweetened by the sense that their death was the death which beyond all others they would have chosen for themselves, that they went to it smiling and without regret, feeling that whatever value their continued presence in the world might be to humanity, it could not be greater than the example and inspiration

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they were to it in so departing. We to whom the idea of death is familiar, walking always among the little mounds and crosses of the men "*mort au champ d'honneur*" know what this means. If I thought that you could feel about me as I feel about them, the single self-reproach I have, that of causing you possible unhappiness, would be mitigated.

I do not say this because I do not expect, eight chances out of ten, to come back safe and sound, but because it is always well to fortify oneself against the undesired event, for by so doing you will make that, if it happens, easier to bear and also you will make the desired, if it occurs, doubly sweet.

The article about Rupert Brooke, in which my name was mentioned (owing to the fact that the editor of this department of the *Literary Digest* is an old friend of mine), gave me rather more pain than pleasure, for it rubbed in the matter which most rankles in my heart, that I never could get my book of poems published before the war. . . . But there is no use crying over spilt milk. I have no doubt the MS. is safe in Bruges, buried as it is; safer, indeed, than it would be, subject to the risks of transportation now. I have good friends who will charge themselves with it if I should be prevented from doing so myself.

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We have finished our eighth month on the firing-line. Rumors are still going round of an imminent return to the rear for reorganization. I think they may really be true this time. I will try to locate parcels, but do not send any more till I do. . . .

### DIARY

*La Neuville, July 8.*—Our last six days in the trenches were broken by the most memorable, extraordinary, and happy event since we enlisted. On the evening of July 3rd the sergeant came quite unexpectedly to get the names of all Americans wanting permission of 48 hours in Paris! We could hardly believe such good fortune possible. But it seems the American journalists in Paris had made up a petition to get us a Fourth of July holiday, and the Minister of War had accorded it. We fairly danced for joy. To see Paris again after almost a year's absence!

We were to leave immediately. So packing our sacks we walked down the *boyau* about night-fall to the *poste du commandement*, where we left all our equipment and got our individual permissions. Then to Merfy, where we spent the night. Next day after breakfast in the village we marched—thirty-two of us in all—to the railway station of Moulin-de-Courmont, on the

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line from Fismes to Reims, where we got on the train at two o'clock and left. Arrived at Noisy-le-Sec at nine and continued to the Gare de l'Est on another train. Joy to walk in the streets of Paris again.

Notable absence of men in Paris; many women in mourning. A great many wounded soldiers on *congé de convalescence*, almost all wearing the old dark blue capote and red trousers. A little *malaise* and discouragement among the Parisians, probably at the absence of good news from Arras, the certain prospect of another winter's campaign, and the great weariness of the war, which it is difficult for them to realize so far from the front. The visit did me good, on the whole, for with all its bringing home the greatness of the sacrifice I am making, it showed me clearly that I was doing the right thing, and that I would not really be so happy anywhere else than where I am. The universal admiration for the soldier from the front was more than any pleasure. It was a matter of pride, too, to salute the officers in the street, especially the wounded, and feel the fellowship with those who are doing the noblest and most heroic thing that it is given to men to do. . . .

Back to the first line trenches again. Then came down here to second line, where we are *cantonné* in a big glass factory just at the point



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where the Aisne canal crosses the *route nationale*. Factory knocked to pieces by bombardment. Very near Reims, where I hope to get permission to go for a day before we leave. The specialty of this place is beer, which the soldiers bring out from Reims every day at three o'clock.

Rumors of great changes in the regiment which have been going about for a long time, seem now to be coming to a head. The Russians, it seems, are to be sent to the Russian army or allowed to join a French regiment. The same with the Belgians. What is left of us after this drain will be joined with what is left of the *1er Etranger* after their charge at Arras, and formed into a single *régiment de marche*. To put through this reorganization will probably mean our going to the rear for a certain time. Juvisy is the place the rumor has it we are going and the date of our departure July 12. *Vamos á ver!*

*July 11.—Section de garde* yesterday. Put in eight hours under the bridge where the national road crosses the canal. Today a comrade and I were to go to Reims, for the captain had promised us permission. I was very anxious to see the state of the city and of the cathedral. But no such luck. We had only come back from the *poste de police* a few hours when "*tout le*

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*monde en tenue, faites vos sacs*" ran down the line from section to section. At first we thought it was an *alerte*, but a few minutes later the real explanation came. All Belgians and Russians to leave for the rear immediately! This long-heralded change at last arrived. Great delight among those affected. Great *cafard* among those not, for it meant that we who were left would have to go back immediately to the trenches, after only two days in second line, to replace the men lost from Battalion F. This we did about midnight and, while half the regiment was noisily commencing its journey back to Orléans, the rest came up through the *boyaux* to their old emplacements, where after a night on guard we now are. For how long? The departure of the Russians and Belgians will take almost two-thirds of the strength of the regiment. Will it be possible to reorganize here on the front, or will it mean going back for a while to a point behind the lines? We all hope so. But all is veiled in secrecy at present.

*Courcelles (near Reims), July 12.*—Stayed in the trenches only twenty-four hours. At midnight we were relieved by the 75th Territorials. Marched back down the *boyaux* to the glass-works at La Neuville, and then continued on down the dark towpath of the canal to Cour-

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celles, on the outskirts of Reims, where we were comfortably *cantonnés* for the night. Have been working hard all the morning on *corvée* with the *génie*. We made three trips to Merfy in a big motor lorry, which we had three times to load and unload with planks and logs. Waiting here with sacks made, expecting momentarily to move. Was accosted this morning by a corporal in the 75<sup>e</sup> Territorial, who remembered seeing me in Lavenue's at Paris, and recognized me, in spite of moustaches and short hair. I remembered him, too.

*Couthenans (Haute-Saône), July 15.*—Spent a quiet night and day in Courcelles. Then yesterday morning before daybreak, *réveil, sac au dos, et départ*. We marched to Muizon, and there the battalion entrained for the first time since the trip to Mailly in October. Cattle cars with benches, one section per wagon, very crowded. An exciting journey, for no one had any idea where we were going. The first general supposition was Orléans, via Noisy-le-Sec, for we knew at least that the chief reason for our going to the rear was reorganization, after the serious thinning of our ranks occasioned by the loss of the Belgian and Russian volunteers, and probable amalgamation with what was left of the 1<sup>er</sup> *Etranger* that was cut up at Arras. This hy-

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pothesis was shaken, however, at a junction near Fère-en-Tardenois, when we turned southward on a branch line to Château-Thierry. We still cherished hopes of going to Orléans by a round-about way, even as far as Châlons, and watched eagerly every junction where a line turned to the right. When at Châlons we forked to the left, the last ray of hope was extinguished and every one was sure that we were headed directly for the terrible sectors of the Argonne and the Meuse. But this discouragement was relieved when, after passing Vitry-le-François (where there was a cemetery filled with crosses for the men who fell in the big battle here in September) we did not branch up to Bar-le-Duc, but turned south to Saint-Dizier. The impression then began to grow that we were going down to Lyon, the dépôt of the *1er Etranger*, and thence to the Dardanelles.

Next morning, however, after one of those frightful nights in troop trains, where, packed together, one cannot stretch out in spite of sleepiness, we woke up at Vesoul. Alsace then seemed to be a certainty to everyone. I for my part was glad, for it is of all places the one which I would choose to fight in and, if need be, to fall. At Belfort we learned our true destination—Montbéliard. Arrived here we expected to go immediately into some *caserne*. No such luck.

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In spite of lack of sleep and the fatigue of the journey, we had to put *sac au dos* and start off in a pouring rain on a ten kilometre "hike" to Couthenans. In the villages on the way were cantonned the Algerian *tirailleurs* who had taken part in the Arras actions. Splendid-looking troops in their new khaki uniforms. Here had been cantonned the remains of the *1er Etranger*, but they moved them elsewhere, for there was some idea against the two regiments coming in contact. So now we are back again with the old Moroccan division, the *troupes d'élite*. We shall be here probably several weeks and then go immediately into some important action. It looks as if the Germans will make an attempt to regain the ground we have taken from them across the Vosges; there are even reports that Hindenburg is coming into Alsace. I expect that we shall go into something very exciting shortly. Meanwhile we are to be reorganized and put through exercises such as we had in Toulouse and Mailly. The country here is very pretty and the inhabitants *gentils*.

*Plancher-Bas (Haute-Saône), July 17.*—All provisions were reversed last night, when the order came to hold ourselves in preparation for immediate departure. This morning *réveil* at 4 o'clock and *sac au dos*. Marched here about 18 or 20 kilometers, through a pleasant hilly

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country, covered with deep woods and rich meadows, the heavy verdure and vegetation of a land of frequent showers. Beyond Chagey passed a monument to the local soldiers of 1870 and presented arms as we marched by. Had a good breakfast at the little inn on arriving; then went out with the squad on 24 hours' guard. The whole *Légion Etrangère* is marching with us and every one expects that we are going into action. I have had the pleasure of meeting Victor Chapman, who is in the mitrailleuse section of a *régiment de marche* of the 1er. It will be pleasant to be together in the big events that we are undoubtedly soon to take part in.

July 19.—I guess we are to be here some time. It is a delightful cantonment. In the little inn, "Le Cheval Blanc," right opposite the house where we are billeted, one can dine very well and linger over coffee and *petits verres*. It is the *arrière* in every sense. Once or twice I have fancied that I caught the distant voice of the cannon in Alsace, but in general one feels far removed from the theatre of war. It is the first country we have been in near the front that the Germans have not passed through, and all the civils are here pursuing their ordinary occupations. The race seems to be strong here, the peasant women buxom and often really pretty.

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We are right at the foot of the Vosges and the scenery is charming.

This morning everyone was full of good will and good spirits, and we really enjoyed the drill and exercises in a big meadow near the town, under a blue sky washed clear by the last few days' rains. We shall probably put in a good deal of time in field exercises from now on, which we are really in need of after a winter in the trenches. They will stand us in good stead if we are to attack in Alsace, as I hope. King returns today after two months' permission, and reports that the French are concentrating here in the East, in view of big operations to come. Wagon-trains of the Moroccan division pass through here continually, conducted by swarthy *indigènes* in khaki and red fez. They will be good men to fight beside.

Today comes the report that the Germans have crossed to the northern front in Poland, and are therefore seriously threatening the Warsaw-Petrograd Railway. The military situation on the Russian front is very interesting. The Grand Duke will be forced to risk a decisive battle around Warsaw or else abandon it. The first is dangerous for him, the latter a terrible loss. Indeed, it is doubtful if he will now have the time or the means to withdraw his centre in Poland. If the Russian centre is surrounded and forced to

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capitulate it will be the *débâcle* so far as our Ally is concerned, and the transfer of immense forces from the eastern to the western front will make our task doubly hard.

*July 27.*—Pleasant days here in the rear. Morning and afternoon we generally have exercises, *marches militaires*, and reviews. But there is always plenty of time on each side of the morning and evening meal to rest, read, or loaf. This we do—King and I usually—in the cafés of the village. There is the “Cheval Blanc” across the street, but pleasantest of all is the Café de la Gare, on account of the pretty *gosse* that serves one there. I am reading Treitschke’s “Lectures on Politics,” that Chapman lent me, and the daily papers, where the news from the Russian front these days is very *passionnant*. The country people here are interesting and agreeable. Next door I sometimes speak with the old man whom one usually finds walking up and down in his yard alone after dark. His son disappeared in the forest of Apremont in October, and has never been heard of since. It was his only son; the daughter showed me one day the photograph of her brother, a fine-looking young fellow, a corporal in one of the Belfort regiments that marched into Alsace at the beginning of the war. It is one of the thousands of similar tragedies



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with which France is filled these days. Of the initial offensive in Alsace and the disastrous adventure at Mulhouse the people here will tell you much, showing the utter foolhardiness and unpreparedness of the enterprise, notwithstanding its gallantry. Bands of *permissionnaires* pass through the village daily, for they have begun to give eight days' permissions to the men on the front, and it may be in the course of a few months that I shall be able to see Paris again. Meanwhile our plans are completely unknown to us and to the *commandement*, too, probably. There is a rumor that we shall be here till the 10th of August. *Quién sabe?*

*July 30.*—Passed a splendid review the day before yesterday at Chaux-la-Chapelle. Got up at daybreak and were off before half past three. Marched the nine or so kilometers over to the review grounds, each battalion behind its *clairons*. The rainclouds had passed over, the sun was up in a glorious sky. The whole Legion was there, and we drew up in a large rectangular field, the woods on one side and a beautiful view of the near mountains at the end. Here we were joined by the rest of the division, two regiments of *Tirailleurs Algériens*. They filed in behind their music—the famous *nouba*—whose effect was most novel and *émotionnant*, an alternation of *clairons*

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and a number of curious wood-wind instruments, supported by bass and treble drums. Their brilliant ancient uniform has been replaced by the ordinary light blue *capote*, baggy khaki trousers and red fez. While waiting for the arrival of the general, we intermingled and fraternized one with another. In the 4<sup>ème</sup> *Tirailleurs* Boubaccer found his younger brother, whom he had not seen for ten years. He is *sous-lieutenant* now. It was this regiment that was in the action at the Ferme d'Alger that I described earlier. It seems the explosion of the mine killed about a half section of the *Tirailleurs*. The rest, after their counter-attack had chased out the assaulting party, threw dead, wounded, and prisoners into the hole and started burying them alive. "*Khouya, khouya!*" (Brother, brother) cried the unfortunates. "*Mais nous avons répondu 'Je connais bas khouya'*" the tirailleur continued, and they were all buried up. . . .

Suddenly the *clairons* sound the *sonnerie* of the general, and we all rush to the *faisceaux*. *Baïonnette au canon!* As he rides by, whom should we recognize but the famous Lyautey himself, only recently arrived in France. He rides along the ranks and raises his hat as he passes the *porte-drapeau* of the *Tirailleurs*, who dips the flag at the same time. He visits the detachments of cavalry and artillery, also, whose trumpets sound

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their own *sonnerie* for the occasion. Then he dismounts in the centre of the field with his staff, receives all the officers and the *sous-officiers* whom he had known in Morocco, and decorates several officers and soldiers, to whom he gives the accolade. After this the *nouba* takes position opposite him and the whole division files by to its curiously exciting music. Return to Plancher-Bas, where we arrive about 2.30 P.M.

*July 31.*—Walked up to Plancher-les-Mines with Victor Chapman; there met Farnsworth, who is in the *1er Etranger*, and we all had dinner together. A dozen *sous-officiers*—old *légionnaires*—were in the room, drinking and making good cheer. These were men who had been at Arras, and the *camaraderie* of soldiers whose bond is that of great exploits achieved in common was of a sort which does not exist among us, and which I envied.

Today comes the news I have been expecting, that the Russians are to evacuate Warsaw. The Germans then will enter probably on the anniversary of the declaration of war, and a wave of enthusiasm will pass over the country, which will drown all memory of past reverses and all discontent at the unlooked-for prolongation of the conflict. The great question now is whether the Russians started their retirement in time, and

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whether they will be able to extricate their central army from the difficult position in which it is placed. If they do not, it will mean disaster. Perhaps historic fatality has decreed that Germany shall come out of this struggle triumphant and that the German people shall dominate in the twentieth century as French, English, Spanish, and Italian have in preceding centuries. To me the matter of supreme importance is not to be on the winning side, but on the side where my sympathies lie. Feeling no greater dignity possible for a man than that of one who makes himself the instrument of Destiny in these tremendous moments, I naturally ranged myself on the side to which I owed the greatest obligation. But let it always be understood that I never took arms out of any hatred against Germany or the Germans, but purely out of love for France. The German contribution to civilization is too large, and German ideals too generally in accord with my own, to allow me to join in the chorus of hate against a people whom I frankly admire. It was only that the France, and especially the Paris, that I love should not cease to be the glory and the beauty that they are that I engaged. For that cause I am willing to stick to the end. But I am ready to accept the verdict of History in this case as I do, and everyone does, in the old cases between Athens

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and Sparta, or between Greece and Rome. Might is right and you cannot get away from it however the ephemeridæ buzz. "*Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*" It may have to be the epitaph on my tomb. I can see it on some green slope of the Vosges, looking toward the East.

*August 7.*—Coming into the Cheval Blanc this morning I found cloth labels lying out to dry on a table, addressed in indelible pencil to the son of the house, who was made prisoner at Lassigny in the first weeks of the war, and who is now in a concentration camp at Cassel, in Germany. They send him bundles of bread and good things to eat every week through the Croix Rouge of Genève, and these *envois* seem to arrive regularly. I remarked to the good woman that her son was really happier as a prisoner than he would be in the trenches, and that she especially ought to consider herself happier than so many other mothers, who must worry all the time and remain in continual uncertainty, but her eyes showed that she had been crying, and she was unable to speak.

It is in these villages behind the lines that one gets an idea how the country is suffering. There is more than one young man back here without a leg or an arm. There is the case of the old

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man next door that I have already mentioned. But the most tragic seems to me that of a mother whose only son appeared early in the list of missing. After months of uncertainty she read his name one day in a list of prisoners in Germany. Full of joy she wrote him and began sending packages. But one day, after several weeks had passed, she received a letter from the soldier she had written to, saying that he had received the letters and packages, that his name was indeed identical with that of the person to whom she addressed them, but that he came from quite a different locality, and was not the son that she sought! And she has never heard anything more.

*Today comes the news of the evacuation of Warsaw!*

### TO HIS MOTHER

August 8, 1915.

I may have been a little careless about writing lately. It is because still being in repose far from the firing line the sense of being out of danger had the effect of lessening the importance I attached to keeping you assured that I was getting along all right. . . .

You must not delude yourself about any revolutions in Germany or an early termination of the war. Look upon my being here just as I

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do, that is, as its being a part of my career. I am not influenced by the foolish American ideas of "success," which regard only the superficial and accidental meanings of the word—advancement, recognition, power, etc. The essence of success is in rigorously obeying one's best impulses and following those paths which conscience absolutely approves, and than which imagination can conceive none more desirable. Given my nature, I could not have done otherwise than I have done. Anything conceivable that I might have done had I not enlisted would have been less than what I am doing now, and anything that I may do after the war is over, if I survive, will be less too. I have always had the passion to play the biggest part within my reach and it is really in a sense a supreme success to be allowed to play this. If I do not come out, I will share the good fortune of those who disappear at the pinnacle of their careers. Come to love France and understand the almost unexampled nobility of the effort this admirable people is making, for that will be the surest way of your finding comfort for anything that I am ready to suffer in their cause.

## IX

AUGUST 10-SEPTEMBER 24, 1915

A brigade march. The Ballon de Servance. The view of the Alps. An improvised band. The Ballon d'Alsace. Vétrigne. In Alsace at last. Anniversary of enlistment. Return to Plancher-Bas. Alsatian school-children learn the "Marseillaise." A chance to leave the Legion. Reviewed by the Président de la République. Departure from Plancher-Bas. To St.-Hilaire by rail. March to Suippes. Night work with pick and shovel. The order from Joffre. Violent cannonade. The great battle imminent.

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*August 10.*—Yesterday the whole brigade marched up to the top of the Ballon de Servance, our regiment from Plancher-Bas and the 1er from Plancher-les-Mines. For us it was about a thirty-eight kilometer "hike," *sac au dos, tenue de campagne complète*. It was one of the finest and most memorable walks I have ever taken. This was largely due to the weather. After weeks of rain (it is raining now again this morning) it was our luck to hit on a day of unbroken sunshine, not a cloud in the sky of almost tropic blue. After leaving Plancher-les-Mines the road was extremely pretty up the deep, wooded val-



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ley of the Rahin. Then came the long climb up the military road. The summit of the mountain is cleared and covered with grass. Here, favored by the fine weather of one day in a hundred, the most wonderful view spread out before us. Southward, 236 kilometers away, Mont-Blanc rose in isolated grandeur above the chain of the Jura. Further east stretched the whole snowy line of the Alps—the Jungfrau, the Wetterhorn, the beautiful mountains that I first saw at Berne a little over a year ago with André—even more romantic and more enchanting now for their great distance.

After lunch I strolled away alone and found just the right point of view, where the grassy summit sheered off precipitously into the deep valley-head, dark with pine forests and full of the murmur of the stream. A sunny haze covered the plains of upper Alsace. Two captive balloons were all the signs of war that were visible. They hung there, little specks in the distance, a good deal lower than my perch on the mountain top. I sat about an hour absorbed in the beauty of that far view of the Alps that filled me with nostalgia and love of the loveliness of Earth. Strange that the last time I looked on the Jungfrau was in the company of Count von Liebermann, lieutenant in the 5th Regiment of the Prussian Guard. This was on the Thun-

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nensee in Switzerland. I wonder where he is now. . . .

At midday we started home behind our *clairons*. It happened that three men, who had formed a little kind of German band with three old brass instruments that they found in the village, had brought these along. When the *clairons* had finished, they hit up one of the *chansons de route* from the ranks, much to the general surprise and amusement, and every one joined in with good will. The men were in fine spirits and we came back singing all the way.

*August 16.*—Another good walk today, this time to the summit of the Ballon d'Alsace, the regiment marching without sack. Left at four o'clock in the morning. Marched up through Plancher-les-Mines and followed the same road up the pretty valley of the Rahin to the point where the Servance road turns off. Here we kept straight on and then walked up through fine pine woods by steep and stony paths to the summit. Not a bad day but no such fine weather as last week. Sky full of clouds, whose lower edges cut the view from the horizons. There is a beautiful point of view on the summit, where there is a sharp descent to a deep valley, with green pastures, ponds, a winding road and a little river that flows down through pretty ham-

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lets toward Massevaux, and out into the hazy plains of Alsace. Forty kilometers away could be seen indistinctly the factory chimneys and church spires of Mulhouse. We saw also the Hartmannsweilerkopf, where such fierce fighting has taken place this last winter. Saluted silently distant Alsace, that will probably be the scene of our coming battles. Returned in the afternoon under the same circumstances as last time.

*August 19.*—We are to leave tomorrow, probably for the Front!

*Vétrigne (near Belfort), August 20.*—We were ordered to be in readiness at any moment. Late in the afternoon it seemed as if there would be a delay; it was not until ten o'clock at night, when most of us were asleep, that the news came definitely that we were to leave today. We were roused, consequently, about two o'clock this morning to make sacks. Got off shortly after four. Marched to Auxelles-Bas, where, branching to the right, all prospect of going toward Thann and the theatre of fighting near Munster was dissipated. A beautiful morning as we crossed the continental divide, which separates the waters that flow into the Rhône and the Mediterranean from those that fall into the Rhine and the gray North Sea. Eastward into the sunrise stretched away the fair plains of

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Alsace. Moments of memorable emotion as we marched singing down the winding road that led us off to this glorious goal. Passed through La Chapelle-sous-Chaux and Sermamagny, where I drank during a *pose* with a brown *Algérien* of the *Tirailleurs* who had been at Arras. Then came around through the outskirts of Belfort to this village, where we are billeted for 24 hours.

I am sitting now under a giant pear tree on a green slope outside the town, enjoying the most beautiful landscape as it fades away gradually in the dying daylight. Wide lowlands stretch away—fields of richest green, cultivated acres, hamlets, groves—bounded toward the southeast by the “many-folded mountains” of Switzerland that rise, crest after crest, each one more faint, toward the far clouds pink in the sunset. The boom of the cannon can be heard, more distant now, in Alsace. Two captive balloons are up along the line of the front. An aeroplane returns toward Belfort from a reconnaissance beyond the lines. A *convoy* of motor lorries raises the dust along the white road eastward. Automobiles dash back and forth. Exquisite peaceful summer evening. The green on forest and field has not begun to be browned yet, but already in the evenings the chill of Autumn is beginning to be felt. Moments of peace, sweet melancholy, resignation, self-content. In the village a chorus

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of soldiers singing the Brabançonne. Anniversary of the German entrance into Brussels. A year ago I left Bruges for Paris to enlist.

*Mortzwiller (Alsace), August 21.*—In Alsace at last. Left Vétrigne at five o'clock this morning: Followed the Cernay road through Rappe and La Chapelle. Crossed the old frontier line without demonstration. German road posts. Immediate change in architecture; picturesque houses with white plaster walls and inset beams. The people all speak German and very bad French. Many German signs about.

*August 24.*—Likelihood of an offensive in Alsace is not so good now. The reason we came here was to put in six days' work on the second line defenses, each regiment in the division doing its turn. This done, we return, they say, to Plancher-Bas! We have already done two days' hard labor renovating a second line trench. Today, the third, I am sick and am staying at home. Fine weather. There is considerable cannonading about here. Right near the place where we work there is a battery of at least six heavy guns that, directed by a captive balloon not far off, fire terrific volleys, to which the Germans reply weakly or not at all.

News of the fall of Kovno makes these times very grave. This means the breaking up of the

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last Russian line of defence and the beginning of an indefinite retreat into the interior. How much of this army will be destroyed or fall into the hands of the Germans, as a result of this latest manoeuvre, remains to be seen. Things look badly for the Allies. The only hope of ultimate victory that I can see is the Balkan States marching with us. Today is the anniversary of my enlistment.

*Plancher-Bas, August 28, 1915.*—Back in Plancher-Bas, again! Our march into Alsace, round which I wove so much romance, was only for the prosaic purpose of working on second line defences, the same kind of work we used to do at Blancs-Sablons. We worked five days and then marched back by the same route, spending the night at Vétrigne. On the way we passed the whole *1er Etranger* going out to do their turn. A tough-looking crowd. There is nothing doing and nothing apparently under way in the Upper Alsace sectors, which are held by territorials. Putting one and two together, it seems to me that the General Staff are at present bringing behind the lines as far as possible, as in our case, the best troops and manning the trenches with second-line formations and territorials. They are recreating a whole *armée active*, who are not to be put into the trenches, but will be thrown

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immediately into the next great offensive. A friend who has been at Giromagny, which is now the headquarters of the division, says that the charge of the 1<sup>er</sup> at Arras gave the Legion a wonderful reputation, and that we are ranked now with the best. No trenches, then, but alternation between periods of work and periods of *repos* and exercises until the great day comes.

I have pleasant memories of Alsace, where it is not improbable that we shall return in another week to do another five or six days of work. In the evenings we would gather in the *Wirtschaft*, drink deep, sing and soon recover our spirits after the hard day's labor. The people are quite German in all outward aspects. The young men are serving in the German army; their little brothers and sisters are learning the "Marseillaise" in the village school. I overheard one of these classes a day when I was sick and went up in the afternoon to the *infirmierie* which was situated in the *mairie*. After each strophe the teacher would correct faults of pronunciation, and the chorus of childish voices would repeat after him in concert, "*abreuve*," "*marchons*," etc. Outside the door in the corridor were a dozen pairs of diminutive sabots.

*September 1.*—Great and unexpected news this morning at report. All American volunteers in

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the Legion are to be given the privilege of entering a French regiment. I have always been loyal to the Legion, notwithstanding the many obvious drawbacks, feeling that the origin of most of the friction within the regiment was in the fact that we had never been in action, and had consequently never established the bond of common dangers shared, common sufferings borne, common glories achieved, which knits men together in real comradeship. It was a great mistake, it seems to me, not to have put the regiment into action immediately when we came on the front last year, when the regiment was strong and the morale good, instead of keeping us in the trenches in comparatively quiet sectors and in a state of inactivity, which was just the condition for all kinds of discontent to fester in. Of course discontent is the natural state of mind of the soldier, and I, who am accustomed to look beneath the surface, always have realized this, but it must be admitted that here discontent has more than the usual to feed upon, where a majority of men who engaged voluntarily were thrown in a regiment made up almost entirely of the dregs of society, refugees from justice and roughs, commanded by *sous-officiers* who treated us all without distinction in the same manner that they were habituated to treat their unruly brood in Africa. I put up with this for a year



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without complaint, swallowing my pride many a time and thinking only of the day of trial, shutting my eyes to the disadvantages I was under because I thought that on that day the regiment, which I have always believed to be of good fighting stock, would do well and cover us all with glory.

Our chance, now that we are in with the Moroccan division, of seeing great things is better than ever. This has almost induced me, in fact, to turn down the offer and stay where I am, since perhaps the greatest glory will be here, and it is for glory alone that I engaged. But, on the other hand, after a year of what I have been through, I feel more and more the need of being among Frenchmen, where the patriotic and military tradition is strong, where my good will may have some recognition, and where the demands of a sentimental and romantic nature like my own may be gratified. I think there is no doubt that I will be happier and find an experience more remunerative in a French regiment, without necessarily forfeiting the chance for great action which is so good here now. Among the regiments of the 7th Army, from which we were allowed to choose, are three of the *active*, who it seems are in the Meuse in exciting sectors. I have chosen the 133<sup>e</sup> *de ligne*, whose *dépôt* is at Belley, and will leave the rest to Fate.

## ALAN SEEGER

*September 13.*—Another splendid review this morning at La Chapelle-sous-Chaux, before the Président de la République and Millerand and several generals. Perfect weather. Thrilled to the magnificent spectacle of the *défilade*, the “Marseillaise,” the disturbing music of the *Tirailleurs*. The whole division was there. Flags were given to the 1er and 2me *Etranger*. And now on returning comes the news of our definite departure tomorrow. I have reasons to be sorry to leave Plancher-Bas. Have had happy moments here.

*Suippes, September 16.*—Left Plancher-Bas for good, day before yesterday evening. The fine weather which had lasted without a break for several weeks came to an end, and the gray skies corresponded with the melancholy that many of us felt at breaking forever with associations that had grown so dear to us. Marched away after dark in the rain, our rifles decorated with bouquets and our *musettes* filled with presents from the good townspeople. The *Tirailleurs* and Zouaves, coming from the direction of Giromagny, preceded us. We entrained at Champagny, about 45 men in a car. Terrible discomfort. Impossible to stretch legs or lie out flat. Several fights; had a fight myself with the corporal. Found ourselves next morning at

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Vesoul and from there followed the same route as on coming, that is, up through Langres, Chaumont, Vitry-le-François, to Châlons. We had been hearing for some time of the big concentration of troops at the Camp de Châlons and were not surprised when we turned north and stopped at the way station of St.-Hilaire. Everything bore testimony of the big offensive in preparation, troops cantoned in the villages, the railroad lines congested with trains of cannon and material, but most sinister and significant, the newly constructed evacuation sheds for the wounded, each one labelled "*blesés assis*" or "*blesés couchés*." Violent cannonade as we disembarked.

Marched seven or eight kilometers up a national road and then made a *grande halte* at sundown for soup. Pleasant country that we marched through, the *Champagne pouilleuse* with its broad plains and vast distances. The good weather had come back and the waxing moon hung in the south. After the *grande halte* we resumed the march at ten o'clock. Everyone in good spirits and full of excitement at the prospect of the big action in preparation that everything bore evidence of. Heavy cannonading continued during the entire march and the northern skies were lit up continually with the German *fusées*. During our last *pose*, just be-

## ALAN SEEGER

fore entering Suippes, several heavy German shells fell into the town with terrific explosions. The flashes of the cannon lit up all the sky like summer lightning. Marched into the dark, silent town about two o'clock in the morning. The civils apparently have all been evacuated. Marched on and bivouacked in an open field beyond the town. Slept well on the ground.

This morning we moved up here into a big grove and pitched tents, the first time we have done this on the front. Do not know whether we are to go up to the trenches or wait here until we go into action. The *2me Etranger* ought certainly to be first. It is going to be a grandiose affair and the cannonade will doubtless be a thing beyond imagination. The attack this time will probably be along a broad front. Our immediate object ought to be Vouziers and the line of the Aisne, but it is probably the object of the *Etat-Major* to expel the Germans from Northern France entirely. They are fortunate who have lasted to see this, and I thrill at the certain prospect of being in the thick of it.

*September 18.*—Took pick and shovel yesterday evening and marched up to the front—the whole regiment—where we worked all night. Our road lay again through dark and silent Suippes, where the moonlight, less covered to-

## LETTERS AND DIARY

night, revealed the heaps of ruins—rent walls, shells of burnt-out buildings, and a whole quarter completely razed by the fire the Germans must have started before evacuating the town a year ago. Took the Vouziers road northward toward the trenches, where the sky was lit continually with the *fusées éclairantes* and the flash of the cannon. At one time during our first *pose* there must have been an attack of some sort, for the German rockets began popping up like “flower pots” of our Fourth of Julys, and the cannon flashes redoubled, but we could hear no fusillade for the continual rumble of traffic on the highroad beside us.

Turned off a side road after a while in the direction of Perthes-les-Hurlus. Climbed a long, gradual ascent. Our batteries fired occasionally close at hand. During last *pose* a half dozen heavy German shells—probably 210s—fell near a battery emplacement near us with the most terrific explosion, the singing shell-fragments falling among us. Walked through the pine groves at the summit of the crest and then came out through a deep-cut *boyau* to a magnificent spectacle. The position here is a valuable one that must once have been fiercely disputed, for it dominates all the low rolling country to the north. Here, illumined by the German *fusées* that shot up continually from their trenches a mile or so

## ALAN SEEGER

off, lay the vast battlefield that in a few days is to see one of the most tremendous actions ever fought. The clouds had blown off, the stars were all out, the night was a glorious one. We formed a long file, one man with a pick and one with a shovel at five yard intervals down the open northern slope and started digging an immense *boyau* to rush troops up through for the attack. Worked all night, then marched back and arrived at bivouac at dawn. A fatiguing night but can sleep late and rest all day.

*September 19.*—Went up and worked again last night. Beautiful starry night; bright moonlight. A pleasure walking up, but the work was tiring and the road long. A violent artillery duel. Our advanced batteries of heavy guns fired continually. The Germans replied less frequently, but when their heavy shells fell by twos and fours the explosions were terrific beyond anything I have heard before on the front. They covered the lines with smoke, through which the *fusées* glimmered, blurred and reddened. The smell of powder was heavy in the air. It was daybreak when we returned. . . .

Today at *rapport* the captain read the order from Joffre announcing to the troops the great general attack. The company drew close around him, and he spoke to us of our reasons for con-

## LETTERS AND DIARY

fidence in success and a victory that would drive the enemy definitely out of France. The German positions are to be overwhelmed with a hurricane of artillery fire and then great assaults will be delivered all along the line. The chances for success are good. It will be a battle without precedent in history.

*September 21.*—About twenty heavy shells fell yesterday evening around the Suippes station, which is right near the park where we are bivouacking. Went out to watch them burst; no serious damage. Went up to work after supper. The dead and wounded were being carried in litters through the streets of Suippes, which had been bombarded, too. The fine weather is continuing, and it was a beautiful moonlit night, but frosty. Hard work until two o'clock digging communication ditches. Officers went down to the trenches to reconnoitre the *terrain*. The captain spoke to us again at *rapport* today, and gave us his impressions of this visit. The Colonials apparently are to lead the attack; we ought to come in the third or fourth wave. Our objective is the Ferme de Navarin, about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  kilometers behind the German lines. Here we will halt to reform, while the entire 8th Corps, including numerous cavalry, will pass through the breach we have made. These will be sublime

## ALAN SEEGER

moments; there are good chances of success and even of success without serious losses.

*September 22.*—The day ought to be near at hand. The artillery is becoming more and more violent and tonight as I write here by candle-light in our tent the cannonade is extremely violent down the line toward Reims. The Germans continue to bombard Suippes and the Suippes station. Luckily they have not discovered our bivouac, for the French keep continual patrols in the air and no German aeroplane dares to come over here. Should they bombard us here the execution of these terrific 210 shells would be appalling. Today several fell in the park, not more than fifty yards from the tent. I thought they were going to bother us, but these were really bad shots at the station that had gone astray. Spend a hard night at work yesterday, leaving here at 6 P. M. and not getting back till 6 this morning. This afternoon walked to Somme-Suippe to try and buy something, but there is nothing to be had. The fine weather continues. We have received steel casques in place of the *képis*.

*September 23.*—Bombardment of the station resumed this morning. Went out to the gate to watch the shells burst. The men of the *génie*



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"beat it" as usual into the fields near by, but a few nervy ones remained to take the little Décauville engines and a trainload of shells out of danger. When the bombardment seemed over I noticed them all running back and commencing digging. Went over and joined them and helped disinter three men who had been buried alive. They had taken refuge in a deep trench that had been dug for the purpose. But a big shell had fallen right beside this trench and covered the unfortunate men with dirt. We dug and dug and finally came upon a piece of cloth. With difficulty we uncovered one after another and pulled them out, but it was too late. They had been smothered to death. . . . Wild rumors are reaching us of victories on other parts of the line. It is said the French have taken the plateau of Craonne and that the English are at Lille.

*September 24.*—We are to attack tomorrow morning. Gave in our blankets this morning; they are to be carried on the wagons. Also made bundles, in order to lighten the sack of all unnecessary articles, including the second pair of shoes. We are admirably equipped, and if we do not succeed it will not be the fault of those responsible for supplying us. A terrific cannonade has been going on all night and is continuing. It will grow in violence until the attack is

## ALAN SEEGER

launched, when we ought to find at least the first enemy line completely demolished. What have they got up their sleeves for us? Where shall we find the strongest resistance? I am very confident and sanguine about the result and expect to march right up to the Aisne, borne on in an irresistible *élan*. I have been waiting for this moment for more than a year. It will be the greatest moment in my life. I shall take good care to live up to it.

NOTE.—The diary ends here, with the following notation: "This diary continued in another that I will carry in the pocket of my capote." All efforts to find this have been in vain.

## X

OCTOBER 4, 1915—APRIL 13, 1916

The Battle of Champagne. Occupation of the German first line trenches. Terror-stricken prisoners. Four days under bombardment. The German second line holds. Failure to break through. The French soldier contrasted with the German. Review after the battle. A false report. The unimportance of the individual. In the rear. A week's permission in Paris. The Ford party. In hospital. *Congé de convalescence*. Biarritz. Recovery of MS from Bruges.

### TO HIS MOTHER

October 4, 1915.

Am writing you in bivouac in a moment of *repos* between two battles to tell you that I am well and in good spirits. The regiment has been in the big action in Ch—— from the beginning——our brigade was the second to leave the trenches. Have been eight days under terrific shell fire. Have taken many prisoners. Am sending S—— as souvenir some German letters picked up in the trenches we carried.

### TO HIS MOTHER

October 25, 1915.

The regiment is back in *repos* after the battle in Champagne, in which we took part from the

## ALAN SEEGER

beginning, the morning of the memorable 25th September. We are billeted in a pleasant little village not far from Compiègne, quite out of hearing of the cannon. It seems that absurd rumors were current about the fate of Americans in the Legion, so I hasten to let you know that I am all right. Quite a few Americans were wounded, but none killed, to my knowledge.

The part we played in the battle is briefly as follows. We broke camp about 11 o'clock the night of the 24th, and marched up through ruined Souain to our place in one of the numerous *boyaux* where the *troupes d'attaque* were massed. The cannonade was pretty violent all that night, as it had been for several days previous, but toward dawn it reached an intensity unimaginable to anyone who has not seen a modern battle. A little before 9.15 the fire lessened suddenly and the crackle of the fusillade between the reports of the cannon told us that the first wave of assault had left and the attack begun. At the same time we received the order to advance. The German artillery had now begun to open upon us in earnest. Amid the most infernal roar of every kind of fire-arms and through an atmosphere heavy with dust and smoke, we marched up through the *boyaux* to the *tranchées de départ*. At shallow places and over breaches that shells had made in the bank we caught momentary

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glimpses of the blue lines sweeping up the hill-side or silhouetted on the crest where they poured into the German trenches. When the last wave of the Colonial brigade had left, we followed. *Baïonnette au canon*, in lines of *tirailleurs*, we crossed the open space between the lines, over the barbed wire, where not so many of our men were lying as I had feared (thanks to the efficacy of the bombardment) and over the German trench, knocked to pieces and filled with their dead. In some places they still resisted in isolated groups. Opposite us, all was over, and the herds of prisoners were being already led down as we went up. We cheered, more in triumph than in hate, but the poor devils, terror-stricken, held up their hands, begged for their lives, cried "Kamerad," "Bon Français," even "Vive la France." We advanced and lay down in columns by two behind the second crest. Meanwhile, bridges had been thrown across trenches and *boyaux*, and the artillery, leaving the emplacements where they had been anchored a whole year, came across and took position in the open, a magnificent spectacle. Squadrons of cavalry came up. Suddenly the long, unpicturesque *guerre de tranchées* was at an end and the field really presented the aspect of the familiar battle pictures—the battalions in manœuvre, the officers, superbly indifferent to danger, galloping

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about on their chargers. But now the German guns, moved back, began to get our range and the shells to burst over and around batteries and troops, many with admirable precision. Here my best comrade was struck down by shrapnel at my side—painfully but not mortally wounded.

I often envied him after that. For now our advanced troops were in contact with the German second-line defenses, and these proved to be of a character so formidable that all further advance without a preliminary artillery preparation was out of the question. And our rôle, that of troops in reserve, was to lie passive in an open field under a shell fire that every hour became more terrific, while aeroplanes and captive balloons, to which we were entirely exposed, regulated the fire.

That night we spent in the rain. With portable picks and shovels each man dug himself in as well as possible. The next day our concentrated artillery again began the bombardment, and again the fusillade announced the entrance of the infantry into action. But this time only the wounded appeared coming back, no prisoners. I went out and gave water to one of these, eager to get news. It was a young soldier, wounded in the hand. His face and voice bespoke the emotion of the experience he had been through in a way that I will never forget. "*Ah, les salauds!*" he cried, "They let us come right up to

## LETTERS AND DIARY

the barbed wire without firing. Then a hail of grenades and balls. My comrade fell, shot through the leg, got up, and the next moment had his head taken off by a grenade before my eyes." "And the barbed wire, wasn't it cut down by the bombardment?" "Not at all in front of us." I congratulated him on having a *blessure heureuse* and being well out of the affair. But he thought only of his comrade and went on down the road toward Souain, nursing his mangled hand, with the stream of wounded seeking their *postes de secours*.

The afternoon of the 28th should have been our turn. We had spent four days under an almost continual bombardment. The regiment had been decimated, though many of us had not fired a shot. After four such days as I hope never to repeat, under the strain of sitting inactive, listening to the slow whistle of 210-millimetre shells as they arrived and burst more or less in one's proximity, it was a real relief to put *sac au dos* and go forward. We marched along in columns by two, behind a crest, then over and across an exposed space under the fire of their 77's, that cost us some men, and took formation to attack on the border of a wood, somewhere behind which they were entrenched. And here we had a piece of luck. For our colonel, a soldier of the old school, stronger for honor than

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expediency, had been wounded in the first days of the action. Had he been in command, we all think that we should have been sent into the wood (and we would have gone with *élan*) notwithstanding that the *1er Etranger* had just attacked gallantly but unsuccessfully and had been badly cut up. The commandant of our battalion, who had succeeded him in command, when he heard, after a reconnaissance, that the wire had not been sufficiently cut, refused to risk his regiment. So you have him to thank.

The last days of the week we went up into first line to relieve the tired *troupes d'attaque*. It was an abandoned German artillery position, full of souvenirs of the recent occupants and of testimony to their hasty departure. They did not counterattack on this sector and we finished this first period in comparative tranquillity.

Then two days *repos* in the rear and we came back to the battle field. The attack of the 6th October netted us some substantial gains but not enough to call into action the *troupes de poursuite* among which we were numbered. It became more and more evident that the German second line of defense presented obstacles too serious to attempt overcoming for the moment, and we began going up at night to work at consolidating our advanced trenches and turning them into a new permanent line. We spent two



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weeks on the front this time. But as luck would have it, the bombardment that thundered continually during this period did not fall very heavily on the wood where we were sheltered and we did not suffer seriously in comparison with the first days.

And now we are back in the far rear again, the battle is over, and in the peace of our little village we can sum up the results of the big offensive in which we took part. No one denies that they are disappointing. For we know, who heard and cheered the order of Joffre to the army before the battle, that it was not merely a fight for a position, but a supreme effort to pierce the German line and liberate the invaded country; we know the immense preparation for the attack, what confidence our officers had in its success, and what enthusiasm ourselves. True, we broke their first line along a wide front, advanced on an average of three or four kilometers, took numerous prisoners and cannon. It was a satisfaction at last to get out of the trenches, to meet the enemy face to face, and to see German arrogance turned into suppliance. We knew many splendid moments, worth having endured many trials for. But in our larger aim, of piercing their line, of breaking the long deadlock, of entering Vouziers in triumph, of course we failed.

This check, in conjunction with the serious

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turn that affairs have taken in the Balkans, makes the present hour a rather grave one for us. Yet it cannot be said to be worse than certain moments that arrived even much later in the course of our Civil War, when things looked just as critical for the North, though in the end of a similar *guerre d'usure* they pulled out victorious.

But perhaps you will understand me when I say that the matter of being on the winning side has never weighed with me in comparison with that of being on the side where my sympathies lie. This affair only deepened my admiration for, my loyalty to, the French. If we did not entirely succeed, it was not the fault of the French soldier. He is a better man, man for man, than the German. Any one who had seen the charge of the Marsouins at Souain would acknowledge it. Never was anything more magnificent. I remember a captain, badly wounded in the leg, as he passed us, borne back on a litter by four German prisoners. He asked us what regiment we were, and when we told him, he cried "Vive la Légion," and kept repeating "Nous les avons eus. Nous les avons eus." He was suffering, but oblivious of his wound, was still fired with the enthusiasm of the assault and all radiant with victory. What a contrast with the German wounded, on whose faces was nothing but terror

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and despair. What is the stimulus in their slogans of "Gott mit uns" and "für König und Vaterland" beside that of men really fighting in defense of their country? Whatever be the force in international conflicts of having justice and all the principles of personal morality on one's side, it at least gives the French soldier a strength that's like the strength of ten against an adversary whose weapon is only brute violence. It is inconceivable that a Frenchman, forced to yield, could behave as I saw German prisoners behave, trembling, on their knees, for all the world like criminals at length overpowered and brought to justice. Such men have to be driven to the assault, or intoxicated. But the Frenchman who goes up is possessed with a passion beside which any of the other forms of experience that are reckoned to make life worth while seem pale in comparison. The modern prototype of those whom history has handed down to the admiration of all who love liberty and heroism in its defense, it is a privilege to march at his side—so much so that nothing the world could give could make me wish myself anywhere else than where I am.

Most of the other Americans have taken advantage of the permission to pass into a regular French regiment. There is much to be said for their decision, but I have remained true to the

## ALAN SEEGER

Legion, where I am content and have good comrades. I have a pride particularly in the Moroccan division, whereof we are the first brigade. Those who march with the Zouaves and the Algerian *tirailleurs* are sure to be where there is most honor. We are *troupes d'attaque* now, and so will assist at all the big *coups*, but be spared the monotony of long periods of inactive guard in the trenches, such as we passed last winter.

I am glad to hear that Thwing has joined the English. I used to know him at Harvard. He refused to be content, no doubt, with lesser emotions while there are hours to be lived such as are being lived now by young men in Flanders and Champagne. It is all to his credit. There should really be no neutrals in a conflict like this, where there is not a people whose interests are not involved. To neutrals who have stomached what America has consented to stomach from Germany—whose ideals are so opposite to hers—who in the event of a German victory would be so inevitably embroiled, the question he put to himself and so resolutely answered will become more and more pertinent.

### ARMY POSTCARD

October 27, 1915.

We are in *repos* now, far in the rear, so do not worry. We passed a magnificent review yester-

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day before King George, President Poincaré, Joffre, and Kitchener—our glorious Moroccan division and I do not know how many others of Colonials—myriads of troops all returned from the battlefield in Champagne.

### ARMY POSTCARD

(Written upon hearing that he had been reported in the American newspapers as missing or killed in the Battle of Champagne.)

October 30, 1915.

I am *navré* to think of your having suffered so. I had just as soon aim my rifle at the fool who played that trick as at any German. But you know what American journalists are. . . . Very soon a week's permission in Paris. I shall be interested to see my poem in print. But I found a glaring grammatical error after sending it. I am usually more careful. Blame it to the trenches. I am writing you in a little café amid the best of comrades. You must take heart thinking of me as always content and really happy as I have never been before and as perhaps I will never be after.

### TO HIS MOTHER

November 9, 1915.

I should have arranged to cable after the attack had I known that any such absurd rumors had

## ALAN SEEGER

been started. Here one has a wholesome notion of the unimportance of the individual. It needs an effort of imagination to conceive of its making any particular difference to anyone or anything if one goes under. So many better men have gone and yet the world rolls on just the same. . . .

Your letter naturally made me unhappy, for it is only in thinking of you that any possible doubts can rise in my mind about having done well in coming here. Philosophy, I know, cannot modify the natural sentiments of the heart, so I will refrain from commenting on your letter. I can only say that I am perfectly content here and happier than I possibly could be anywhere else. I was a spectator, now I am an actor. I was in a shallow, now I am moving in the full current. It is better in every respect, and since it was inevitable, there is no use lamenting. . . .

### TO HIS MOTHER

November 30, 1915.

The prospects are that we are to be here in the rear all winter. The entire division is in *repos* now and will probably remain so until next spring. We are *troupes d'attaque* and are only to participate in the big actions. In the meantime rest and keeping in condition.

This is a great piece of luck. I cannot congratulate myself enough on my foresight in

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choosing to stay with the Legion instead of going into the 170<sup>me</sup> with the other Americans. I have letters from them occasionally, and it seems they are still on the front in Champagne, in the same desolate sector—hard work at night, guard at the outposts, bombardment, grenade fights—three wounded already and evacuated. Whereas here we are quite tranquil, in a big town where everything can be had, barely within hearing of the cannon, and next week I go to Paris for eight days' permission. *C'est la bonne vie*. I can go into the 8<sup>me</sup> Zouaves if I want, but am not decided yet. Am quite content here. The two regiments form one now (as you see by the address) of three battalions. Our old flag has gone to the Invalides and we march now under the flag of the 1<sup>er</sup>, decorated with the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme*, for the citation after the Arras affair last May.

### TO HIS MOTHER

December 19, 1915.

I am just back from a week's permission in Paris. Had a very good time. The sums in bank, which I have drawn on, have often filled with pleasure moments that otherwise would have been empty and discouraging. And naturally they have made me able also to give pleasure to comrades who have nothing at all.

## ALAN SEEGER

The division is not going to Serbia, so you need not have any inquietudes on that subject. We probably shall not see action again before spring. Then there will doubtless be another *foudroyant* attempt to drive the Germans out of their positions, for which I hope more success than the previous ones.

Meanwhile the conflagration spreads and there is not the smallest glimpse of hope of seeing it finish inside of years and years. This is a little disheartening. But as in times of peace there is nothing better than love and art, so in times of war there is nothing better than fighting and one must make the best of it, finding the recompense in feeling one's heart pulse in concert with those of the élite who are doing the most admirable thing, rather than with those of the multitude who are concerned with second-best things.

It must be some time now since I wrote. But you must not worry about lapses like this, for we are not on the front now and will only take part in the big actions, after which I will see that you are notified by telegraph. There is no news here. Life is uneventful.

### TO HIS MOTHER

December 27, 1915.

I received the two boxes of guava jelly in perfect condition—as if they had come from Paris



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instead of Cuba. . . . We changed cantonment a short time ago and marched over here to a little village about 10 kilometers south of the Aisne. We are here in reserve in case of a German offensive during the flood season, such as they made last year, where our positions north of the river are a little precarious. We face the enemy here at the point where they are nearest Paris. You can understand my satisfaction that our division is among those assigned to the most responsible posts now. Personally I don't think that the Germans are going to attack and I don't expect to see action again until next spring.

The Ford party is certainly amusing. But you make a mistake in thinking that the U. S. are hated here or even to any marked extent ridiculed. Wilson's notes are laughed at much more than Ford's excursion, for example, which is at least action, though misguided action. His supposedly generous motives are generously recognized. And the ridicule that the obvious futility of the manœuvre might excite is tempered by the immense secret longing for peace that is the universal undercurrent in Europe now. Only all the nations have waded so deep in blood now that they think it less costly to go right over than to return where they started from, to which a premature peace would be equivalent. So it must go on till it is decided by arms. . . .

## ALAN SEEGER

February 1, 1916.

I am in hospital for the first time, not for a wound unfortunately, but for sickness. Funny I should be ill this winter when we are in the rear, whereas I passed the last from October to July in the trenches without missing a day. I usually have an attack of grippe every year in midwinter, but this time it took hold of me more seriously than ever before and the fever ran so high that I had to be evacuated. They call it "*bronchite*." I have been here two weeks and the fever still comes round regularly every evening, but diminishing now. The old trouble of not being able to breathe deep. I am getting well now but am weak. Until further notice do not address letters to regiment but to F. L. & T. Co. The reason is that after leaving here I shall have a *congé de convalescence*, after which I shall probably go to the dépôt at Lyon instead of directly back to the regiment, according to custom. Then I shall return to the regiment with the next detachment of reinforcements, but will not be assigned to the same battalion or company. This means very likely that I shall not return to the regiment for quite a while to come.

Seeing the division is not on the front does not displease me at all. The life in time of war has lots of drawback gains in security it gains also in

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excessively hard, consisting of daily drills and, three or four times a week, all day battalion or regiment manoeuvres, combined with long marches and all kinds of devices to keep the troops in shape. This is all right in good weather, but good weather in France is rare in winter. The divisions of the colonial corps which are to do big work in the spring are being put through the hardest kind of training, for modern warfare has proved such a novelty that organization and instruction has practically had to be begun anew. But all this is chiefly important for the officers and *sous-officiers*. I know my business well enough now to be able to dispense with it very easily. I shall get rest and a change of air, liberty and solitude and even the chance to write a little.

As for my book of poems, it is better not to talk about that. It is the great disappointment of my life. . . . When I was in Paris I met the whole Embassy, from the Ambassador down, and they have taken the matter in hand and may surreptitiously be able to extradite the MS. If it is lost it will be a terrible blow to me.

You are right in making the most of past moments of happiness. There is a common bourgeoisie which, associated with the common ideal of a man finally making enough money to be able to retire and live on his income,

## ALAN SEEGER

pictures the happy life as a kind of steady progression through a series of ups and downs toward a kind of plateau, the summit of which once attained, he can thereafter march along tranquilly on a level of unbroken and indestructible well-being. It is perfectly clear that such a notion is entirely illusory, in the multiple accidents to which life is susceptible, for even supposing that he has attained such a level by the realization of every other earthly ambition, he is always walking on the unstable brink of the love that he has created for himself and upon which he is dependent, the crumbling of which beneath his feet by death or abandonment would immediately plunge him into the blackest of abysses, where everything else that he had realized would mean nothing. As for myself, I look upon life as a series of ups and downs, right up (or down) to the very end. The idea of being any higher at the end than at the beginning was never part of my reveries. I never conceived the advent of a moment when turbulence and strife could be thought of as put definitely behind one. But I clung passionately to, and drank deep of, such moments of happiness as circumstances set before me—the importance to me was the moment that joy rescued from oblivion—and for me the measure of a happy life was simply the proportion in which the sum-total of these moments of happiness,

## LETTERS AND DIARY

scattered indiscriminately through it, outbalanced the sum-total of the unhappy ones.

I may not be back with the regiment until spring, but I shall march with it to the big attack. This summer will see the decisive campaign of the war. If we can break through, carry trenches and fortins, get them on the run, advance north, north, through nights red with the flame of burning villages, enter the big conquered cities and deliver a population for two years captive and oppressed, it would be the experience of a thousand years, an emotion that would more than compensate all the sacrifices I have made, something really worth risking your life for. If we don't do it this time, it will be about proven that it can't be done. . . .

### TO A FRIEND

February 26, 1916.

Your letter finds me here in the hospital, where I have been for a month now for a "*bronchite*" or "*congestion pulmonaire*" or whatever they call it. . . . I shall soon get out and then will have a month's *cong  de convalescence*, which will mean two months' rest and freedom and comfort behind the lines out of a winter of the worst kind of weather. Then rejoining the regiment I shall be just in time for the big offensive, which is the only thing that really matters.

## ALAN SEEGER

Your letters always have a double interest for me, not only, relatively, as coming from yourself, but also, absolutely, as emanating from a very unusual personality. Old man Yeats (whom, by the way, you ought to know if he is still at the old stand, *quatre cent et quelque* West 29th St., —chez Mlles. Petitpas) used to define Culture as the understanding and the employ of intellect as an instrument of pleasure. You seem to have this understanding to a remarkable degree. Remarkable particularly because among women, who are *ipso facto* denied the numerous occupations that men have to choose from to make life seem worth while, it is pre-eminently sensibility that is developed far beyond and to the expense of all the other faculties, like the rose that gardeners make exquisite by cutting off all the other buds on the stalk. And remarkable again because the emotional life is not closed to you, as it is to the vast majority of "intellectual" women, whose intellectuality is only a recourse to cover a bald spot, but yours when you choose to yield yourself to it.

Of all the formulas that claimed my early youth, one to which I can still adhere is that of the three categories, the lust for power, the lust for feeling and the lust for knowledge, to one or the other of which I can assign all those who, in their passion to live fully, are the supermen, the

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élite of humanity. Take as respective types Napoleon, Byron, Pico della Mirandola. All superior minds attach themselves more or less remotely to one of these three ideals. I make no distinction between them; those who attain eminence through either one may, in their way, be equally admirable. It is through knowledge that you seek revelation; I seek it through feeling. But I understand the paths that you have chosen, because, as a matter of fact, I started out on them myself.

As you may remember, in the years when I was at college, I was a devotee of Learning for Learning's sake. My life during those years was intellectual to the exclusion of almost everything else. The events of that life were positive adventures to me. Few, I am sure, have known more than I did then the employ of intellect as an instrument of pleasure. I shut myself off completely from the life of the University, so full, nevertheless, of pleasures. I scoffed at these pleasures that were no more to me than froth. I felt no need of comradeship. I led the life of an anchorite. At an age when the social instincts are usually most lively I came to understand the pleasures of solitude. My books were my friends. The opening to me of the shelves of the college library, a rare privilege, was like opening the gates of an earthly paradise. In

## ALAN SEEGER

those dark alleys I would spend afternoons entire, browsing among old folios, following lines of research that often had no connection with my courses, following them simply for the pleasure of the explorer discovering new countries. I never regret those years. They made their contribution. Their pleasures were tranquil and pure. Their desires were simple and all the means of satisfying them were at hand.

I need not describe to you my apostasy from learning, because you can find it described perfectly by Balzac. Take the case of Eugène de Rastignac in *Père Goriot* or more particularly of Raphael de Valentin in the *Peau de Chagrin*. Young men, absorbed, like myself, in their studies, accepting cheerfully solitude and poverty in the pursuit of their one interest, they were suddenly *éblouis* by the vision of the world and the more glittering forms of pleasure to be had through the instrument of Sense. Straightway the charm was broken. From that moment they were haunted by an image that destroyed irremediably the peace of mind, the singleness of purpose, the power of concentration, so essential to the intellectual life. Their poverty became irksome, their isolation intolerable. Obsessed by the burning vision of Happiness, they left the quiet groves of the Academy and went down into the city in search of it.



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It has been the history of many young men, no doubt. But my hedonism, if such it may be called, was not superficial like that of so many, to whom the emotional means only the sexual. I was sublimely consistent. For seeing, in the macrocosm, all Nature revolve about the twin poles of Love and Strife, of attraction and repulsion, so no less in the microcosm of my individual being I saw the emotional life equally divided between these two cardinal principles. The dedication to Love alone, as Ovid prettily confesses his own in more than one elegy, is good as far as it goes, but it only goes half way, and my aspiration was to go all the gamut, to "drink life to the lees." My interest in life was passion, my object to experience it in all rare and refined, in all intense and violent forms. The war having broken out, then, it was natural that I should have staked my life on learning what it alone could teach me. How could I have let millions of other men know an emotion that I remained ignorant of? Could not the least of them, then, talk about the thing that interested me most with more authority than I? You see, the course I have taken was inevitable. It is the less reason to lament if it leads me to destruction. The things one poignantly regrets are those which seem to us unnecessary, which, we think, might have been different. This is not my case. My

## ALAN SEEGER

being here is not an accident. It is the inevitable consequence, as you see, of a direction deliberately chosen.

I often wonder if you will ever experience a revolution of sentiment similar to that which I have described and play truant to the idols to which you have hitherto been faithful, absorbed by a new passion which you will find suddenly become all your life and all your thought and all your desire. . . . You have doubtless learned a great many things this year. To what you already know let me, in closing this letter, add one piece of advice. Do not allow Age alone authority in giving counsel. There is that authority also which he alone possesses who, having stood at the very gates of Death, not knowing at what moment his call might come, has, looking backward, surveyed life in the perspective that can be had from this angle alone. I have seen my life all unrolled, in such moments. And I can assure you that in that panorama everything else faded away, obscured in the haze of oblivion, through which only gleamed clear and distinct, like green, sunlit islands, the hours when we have loved and been beloved.

Therefore hear this my advice. If ever you find yourself suddenly devoured by the divine passion, consult only your heart. Yield to your instincts. Possessed by the force which holds

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the stars in their orbits, you cannot err. For it is Nature that is asserting itself in you, and in Nature alone is Truth. What though your abandonment to it bring deception and unhappiness. You have yet enriched your life with some particle of a beauty that can never fade. . . . For love is the sun of life. The soul that draws near to it is beautiful as Venus, whose rays, so close it is, are never seen but mingled with the sun's own. The lives that deny it are like Neptune or those dead planets still farther off, if such there be, wandering around in the cold, outer spheres, without greenness, without warmth, without joy. . . .

### TO HIS MOTHER.

ARGIZAGITA, BIARRITZ, BASSES-PYRÉNÉES.

March 7, 1916.

I hope you got my letters from the hospital soon enough to be reassured about my not being at Verdun. This ought to have been a comfort to you. Of course, to me it is a matter of great regret and I take it as a piece of hard luck. I know the division left early for the scene of action, a kind of fourth alarm, like in a fire, that brought it all the way from the Camp de Crève-cœur in the Oise. But I have been unable as yet to find whether they have been engaged or to what extent. All my letters to this effect remain unanswered.

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The French seem to have done very well in this battle and I am quite satisfied with the result so far. If the Germans find themselves unable to advance on this front, as it looks at present, this affair may mark the turning point in the war, and is sure in any case to have a very important effect on it.

Was it not good of Madame de Bonand to invite me here for my convalescence? It is a most beautiful place; I don't believe there is a finer site in Biarritz. The house too is the very ideal of comfort and luxury. Fancy me after a year and a half of sleeping with my clothes on in trenches and haylofts, sleeping now in a most voluptuously soft bed in a pink and white room, with a tiled bathroom adjoining. A little reading lamp is by my pillow at night; in the morning around ten o'clock I press a button and a maid comes, opens my shutters and brings me café au lait and toast and jam. The view from my window is superb: to the right a little corner of sea that looks for all the world like the pictures of the bay of Naples, with a mountain, like Vesuvius, behind. Then all around the rest of the horizon the long line of the Pyrenees, covered with snow now, right to the foot. The air, of course, is fine and I ought soon to be in the best of shape again.

I am sorry to hear that you could not stay in

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Havana. . . . All climates are alike to me, but the best now are those that smell of powder in the day and are lit by the *fusées éclairantes* at night. Well, *bon courage*, and lots of love. . . .

PARIS, April 13, 1916.

I have been negligent about writing, but seeing that I have not been in danger, I did not feel the same need to keep you informed. . . . I have greatly enjoyed this vacation, which, with the time I was in the hospital, will have given me three months and a half out of the army. I have had the less cause to regret it because neither the regiment nor any units of our *corps d'armée* have been in action, but have still remained in reserve, engaged only on strengthening the back lines of defense—tiresome work. When I go back the first of May, I shall probably be just in time for the big spring attacks.

Did I write you that the Embassy have managed to get my MS. from Bruges? It was very interesting to reread this work which I had entirely forgotten. I found much that was good in it, but much that was juvenile too, and am not so anxious now to publish it as it stands, but will probably make extracts from it and join with what I have done since.

I shall go back the first of May without regrets. These visits to the rear confirm me in my convic-

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**tion that the work up there on the front is so far the most interesting work that a man can be doing at this moment, that nothing else counts in comparison. . . .**

## XI

MAY 12-JUNE 28, 1916

A month in Paris. A view of the invaded country. The death of Colette. A visit to the German barbed wire. Bellinglise. Subterranean lodgings. The "Ode to the Memory of the American Volunteers fallen for France." A forest abode. The welcome *colis*. Quiet preceding the Somme offensive. The last sonnet. A hard march. Leaving for the attack in first wave. . . .

### TO A FRIEND

May 12, 1916.

After spending a very happy month in Paris, I came back to the front the first of this month. I took my fill of all the pleasures that Paris can give (and it was Paris at its most beautiful). I lived as though I were saying goodbye to life, and now I am quite content to return. It means no more to me than going to the country for the summer; I have the feeling of being in an immensely magnified boys' camp, where work is play, war a sport, and everyone is joyous and light-hearted.

This bright impression is due partly to Spring, partly to the beauty of our surroundings, and to the tranquillity of the sector. We are in the depths of the spring forest; violets and lilies of

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the valley bloom in the beechen shade; cuckoos and wood-pigeons croon in the heavy foliage. Our trenches are at one side of a little open valley, and the enemy on the other. But neither side bothers the other very seriously; you seldom hear a rifle-shot, and even the artillery is not very active. We are not here to fight, but simply to replace troops that have gone to Verdun, and, incidentally, to put in a lot of hard work strengthening our lines. There have been days when the *réveil* was at 3.30, *rassemblement* at 4, work till 10, soup and *repos* till 11.30, and then work again till 5. Hours like this would mean a strike in time of peace when men earn ten francs a day for day labor; here where they earn five sous, no one murmurs.

Our position here is a very dominating one, and from the artillery observation posts or through holes in the foliage you can look way back into the *pays envahi*. It is a most beautiful landscape—forests, orchards, the red-tiled roofs of little villages that the French artillery has carefully spared. There is something fascinating to me about these deep northern horizons. This north of France has become a kind of enchanted land to my imagination, so inaccessible it seems, so mysterious, so isolated from the outside world. To think that these thin lines of turned red earth in front of us, these *réseaux* of barbed wire, and



## LETTERS AND DIARY

an utterly invisible enemy behind them, prevent us from going forward and liberating it! I have sat long musing on these beautiful vistas and wondering what is going on in those lost cities and villages of the north, where three and a half million French have been living for almost two years now, completely cut off from the rest of their countrymen. They tell me that Easter morning the artillerymen through a telescope saw the civilians going to church along a country road seven or eight kilometers behind the lines. A patrol that approached very near a village situated right on the German lines reports having heard a woman's laugh in the night. All I have heard here is the eternal "*Français kaput!*" that the Germans shout over at sunrise all along the front.

I had expected to return just in time for a big offensive, but as yet one sees no sign of it. Perhaps the Verdun affair has really retarded our plans, as the Germans no doubt intended in making it. Our general of division is reported to have been very anxious to go to the Meuse, but was told to be patient, that a much greater honor was being reserved for us later. Our whole *corps d'armée* has been unaffected by the battle at Verdun. I hope that there are enough others like it to enable us to resume the offensive in the near future with as good chances as we had in Cham-

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pagne last Fall, when somebody blundered and we fell just short of success. Cambrai, St. Quentin, Laon, Vouziers—what an emotion to march into them behind our flags unfurled and *musique en tête!* It will be hard, but I cannot think that it is impossible. . . .

TO HIS MARRAINE, MRS. WEEKS

May 13, 1916.

I presume you received my letter of a few days since. This is the third day of our period in *repos*. It has been raining all day, which is rather welcome, because it has meant no work—even in *repos*, you know, we are supposed to work, just to be kept occupied and out of the mischief that Satan is supposed to find for idle hands. The château, in the grounds of which we are barracked, has a most beautiful name—Bellin-glise. Isn't it pretty? I think I shall have to write a sonnet to enclose it, as a ring is made express for a jewel. It is a wonderful old seventeenth century manor, surrounded by a lordly estate. What is that exquisite stanza in "Maud," about "in the evening through the lilacs (or laurel) of the old manorial home?" Look it up and send it to me. Or send me a little copy of "Maud" complete. But that would be too hard to find. . . .

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### TO A FRIEND

May 19, 1916.

After a delightful month in Biarritz and another in Paris, I came back here the first of the month. I had really had such a good time, as I say, that I returned quite light-hearted. . . . The sector was the quietest I had seen and one of great beauty, in the depths of the spring forest. Life here, in spite of the hard work, seemed no more than camping out and war only another way of spending the summer agreeably. These bright impressions, however, received a terrible shock yesterday and as I am still under the emotion of it, I will describe it to you.

With the warm weather we had left the underground bomb proofs and pitched little shelter tents under the trees, where we slept or rested between the hours of guard. The dugouts were too hot and dirty and the sector seemed so calm that there was no danger. There were daily artillery duels, but battery sought battery and we were never troubled. Yesterday morning, however, a German aeroplane came over our lines. The cannonade was violent all day, but no one pays any attention to that and most of us were lying down under our *toiles de tente*, when suddenly "whizz-bang!" "whizz-bang!" "whizz-bang!" a terrific *rafale* of shrapnel began burst-

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ing right in our midst. Rush for the *abris*. But that there were victims was inevitable. Moans from outside. Cries to lend a hand. A sergeant and seven men had been touched. The most serious case was Corporal Colette, a splendid fellow whom everyone liked. They took him away on a litter, but he died before reaching the ambulance. Havoc in our little camp that had been so peaceful. Air full of dust and smell of powder, ground littered with leaves and branches, tents, clothes, equipment, riddled with holes, ground splashed and trailed with blood. Naturally since then we have had to come back into the bombproofs, where deep underground, we live in holes like those that I remember pictured in our old natural histories, that show a gopher, an owl and a snake all living happily together in the same burrow. Here it is men, rats, and vermin.

This is a typical episode in our life here on the front. It happens quickly and is quickly forgotten. Life is so cheap here. The soldier's life has its hard moments, but the bright side is not lacking either—good health and good comradeship, the allurements of danger, joys of the open air, the march, and the celebrations when we go back to the rear.

I am writing you this from the first line trenches. A French aeroplane is circling over-

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head and being bombarded by the Boches. It is the close of a beautiful spring day. With night-fall we will go to the outposts to resume the guard. We do not take this sector very seriously, for we all know that big things are in preparation, wherein our division expects to win new laurels. This is simply an interim. . . .

### TO HIS MARRAINE

May 23, 1916.

The week in the trenches was a week of the most beautiful weather. . . . These days were saddened by the death of poor Colette in the bombardment and by the suffering of his brother who has now returned after the burial. They were marked on the other hand by two afternoons of rather memorable emotion. Exasperated by the inactivity of the sector here and tempted by danger, I stole off twice after guard and made a patrol all by myself through the wood paths and trails between the lines. In the first of these, at a crossing of paths not far from one of our posts, I found a burnt rocket-stick planted in the ground and a scrap of paper stuck in the top, placed there by the Boches to guide their little mischief-making parties when they come to visit us in the night. The scrap of paper was nothing else than a bit of the *Berliner Tageblatt*. This seemed so interesting

## ALAN SEEGER

to me that I reported it to the captain, though my going out alone this way is a thing strictly forbidden. He was very decent about it though, and seemed really interested in the information. Yesterday afternoon I repeated this exploit, following another trail, and I went so far that I came clear up to the German barbed wire, where I left a card with my name. It was very thrilling work, "courting destruction with taunts, with invitations," as Whitman would say. I have never been in a sector like this, where patrols could be made in daylight. Here the deep forest permits it. It also greatly facilitates ambushes, for one must keep to the paths, owing to the underbrush. I and a few others are going to try to get permission to go out on *patrouilles d'embuscade* and bring in some live prisoners. It would be quite an extraordinary feat if we could pull it off. In our present existence it is the only way I can think of to get the Croix de Guerre. And to be worthy of my marraine I think that I ought to have the Croix de Guerre.

Here are two sonnets I composed to while away the long hours of guard. . . . I will send you back again the Tennyson after having refreshed myself with it, for one must lighten the sack as much as possible. Found all the old beauties and discovered new ones. Read

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the last paragraphs of Maud and see if you do not think they have a striking bearing on the present situation.

### BELLINGLISE

#### I

Deep in the sloping forest that surrounds  
The head of a green valley that I know,  
Spread the fair gardens and ancestral grounds  
Of Bellinglise, the beautiful château.  
Through shady groves and fields of unknown grass,  
It was my joy to come at dusk and see,  
Filling a little pond's untroubled glass,  
Its antique towers and mouldering masonry.  
Oh, should I fall, tomorrow, lay me here,  
That o'er my tomb, with each reviving year,  
Wood-flowers may blossom and the wood-doves croon;  
And lovers by that unrecorded place,  
Passing, may pause, and cling a little space,  
Close-bosomed, at the rising of the moon.

#### II

Here where in happier times the huntsman's horn  
Echoing from far made sweet midsummer eves,  
Now serried cannon thunder night and morn,  
Tearing with iron the greenwood's tender leaves.  
Yet has sweet Spring no particle withdrawn  
Of her old bounty; still the song-birds hail,  
Even through our fusillade, delightful Dawn;  
Even in our wire bloom lilies of the vale.  
You who love flowers take these; their fragile bells  
Have trembled with the shock of volleyed shells,  
And in black nights when stealthy foes advance  
They have been lit by the pale rockets' glow  
That o'er scarred fields and ancient towns laid low  
Trace in white fire the brave frontiers of France.

May 22, 1916.

## ALAN SEEGER

### TO HIS MOTHER

May 23, 1916.

We are just back after six days in first line. We are lodged in a big quarry in the woods. It is rather cold and damp inside, but extremely picturesque — immense subterranean galleries, foursquare, cut in the solid rock, pitch black inside with here and there little points of light where the men stick their candles.

The week in first line was very pleasant. The weather was superb and I was never bored an instant, neither in the beautiful days when the unclouded sunlight came filtering through the branches of the forest, nor in the starry nights that at this time of year fade even before two o'clock into the wonder of the spring dawn. Nothing more adorable in Nature than this daybreak in the northeast in May and June. One hears the cockcrows in the villages of that mysterious land behind the German lines. Then the cuckoos begin to call in the green valleys and all at once, almost simultaneously, all the birds of the forest begin to sing. The cannon may roar, and the rifles crackle, but Nature's program goes on just the same.

The likelihood of a big action in the near future is vanishing more and more. The general opinion is that Verdun has not only *mangé*



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*beaucoup de monde* but what is more important, *beaucoup de munitions*. As the French seem in counterattacks to be making serious efforts and even on a large scale to regain some of the lost ground, I do not expect anything on other parts of the front for some time to come, unless it be the English. If it turn out that we have actually retaken Douaumont, it will be a magnificent achievement. I shall ask permission to go out and leave the newspapers on the German barbed wire. I have already made several patrols here and know the ground.

Goodbye; *bon courage*.

### TO HIS MARRAINE

June 1, 1916.

What a bitter disappointment! After having worked feverishly on my poem and finished it, in spite of work and other duty, in the space of two days, behold the 29th comes and the 30th, and no permission arrives. It would have been such an honor and pleasure to have read my verses there in Paris; I counted on seeing you and getting a moment's respite from the hard life here. To have raised my hopes and then left me in the lurch like that was certainly cruel. I am awaiting an explanation. I sent my ode yesterday to those who asked me for it, to show that I at least had done my part. They may

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be able to publish it in the New York *Herald*, but not having graced the occasion for which it was written it is as good as still-born and shorn of all effect.

Meanwhile we have come back to *première ligne* and are again in the little camp where Colette was killed. Strange how quickly one forgets here on the front. For a few days after that disaster the men kept to the *abris*, but now we are again careless as before and are living outside in the fine weather, though the same thing may happen again at any moment. I have a charming little house, made by bending down saplings and tying them overhead into a leafy roof. In this I have made a bed out of four logs, fastened into a rectangle about three feet by seven, between which chicken wire is strung, and then spread with new straw; *voilà* a most clean and comfortable couch. All around are sylvan scents and sounds and the morning sunshine slanting through the heavy foliage.

What have I to thank you for since my last letter? The *briquet*, I think, and the aluminum flask, both of which were exactly the right thing. You cannot imagine what pleasure it is to receive these parcels. You see now we are living entirely in the woods, and never go back to the village cantonments, so that it is extremely difficult to get little luxuries of any kind. The

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quart and a half of wine (quarter of a litre, understood) that the government gives must suffice and the coarse army bread must be eaten dry, and the meal finished without dessert. That is why *colis* are so welcome and the pleasure of receiving them comparable to nothing except that of a child opening his Christmas stocking. Is it not pathetic to be in a state where a man's utmost possibilities of *volupté* are confined to the vulgar sense of taste, the lowest of all?

The noticeable young man you describe as having seen at Lavenue's was probably myself, for it was my pleasure in those days to be noticeable just as now it is exactly the opposite. Where once it was my object to be individual, it is now an even greater satisfaction to merge into the whole, and feeling myself the smallest cog in the mighty machinery that is grinding out the future of the world, whatever that is to be. . . .

### TO HIS MOTHER

June 4, 1916.

We are back again from another six days in the trenches,—back, I say, but not very far,—about 500 metres from first line perhaps, in the big quarry that I think I have already described to you. The six days went off fairly peacefully,

## ALAN SEEGER

though the Germans became aggressive at times and approaching our posts under cover of the forest in broad daylight took pot shots at our sentinels, without however doing any damage. This sector has one exciting feature which I have not found in others: the deep woods allow patrols to circulate between the lines in daylight. There are frequent encounters and ambuscades. This is very good sport.

I hardly think that we are to be here much longer. The enemy are so pushing the game along all the fronts that our reserves will soon have to be thrown in. There is this comfort, that when we go, it will not be to sit in a ditch, wait, and be deluged with shells, but we will go directly into action, magnificently, unexpectedly, and probably victoriously, in some dashing charge, even if it be only of local importance. In that moment, trust, as I do, in the great god, Chance, that brings us in life, not only our misfortunes, but our greatest bits of happiness, too. Think of so many who are ingloriously stricken by accident in time of peace. War is another kind of life insurance; whereas the ordinary kind assures a man that his death will mean money to someone, this assures him that it will mean honor to himself, which from a certain point of view is much more satisfactory.

## LETTERS AND DIARY

I was asked by a committee in Paris to write an ode in memory of American volunteers fallen for France and to be read on Decoration Day at a little ceremony before the statue of Washington in Paris. They were to get me a permission of 48 hours for that purpose. I had only two days to work in, days full of *boyau*-digging with pick and shovel, but by making an effort I managed to compose the poem in time. And then, after all, the permission never arrived. Imagine if I was not disappointed.

We are having the most beautiful weather and I am in excellent health. I sleep outdoors as much as possible. Of course we would be out all the time if it were not for the shelling, which makes it often advisable to keep to the *abris*. These are formidable affairs now,—tunnelled dugouts, thirty feet or so underground. Inside beds of stretched chicken wire are made in tiers like berths in a ship. . . .

### TO HIS MARRAINE

June 4, 1916.

. . . I hardly think we shall be here much longer. I have a presentiment that we are soon going into action. The last rumor is that we are soon to go to Verdun to relieve the 2nd Moroccan division. That would be magnificent, wouldn't it?—the long journey drawing

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nearer and nearer to that furnace, the distant cannonade, the approach through the congested rear of the battle-line full of dramatic scenes, the salutations of troops that have already fought, "Bon courage, les gars!" and then our own début in some dashing affair. *Verdun nous manque*. I should really like to go there, for after the war I imagine Frenchmen will be divided into those who were at Verdun and those who were not. . . .

### TO HIS MOTHER

June 15, 1916.

I have been back in a little village in the rear for ten days, part of a detachment sent to learn the working of a new arm, which will be used for the first time in the coming attacks. These have been ten days of comparative comfort and pleasure, for one can sleep peacefully at night, take shoes off for a change, and in the days after soup there are little inns where one can sit before a table once more and enjoy coffee and bread and jam and wine, between 5 and 8 in the evenings. The new arm, which I am not at liberty to describe, is an excellent weapon and ought to give good results. I am glad to have charge of one, for it is a more or less responsible position, and one where there is a chance for personal initiative.

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The hour of our being relieved here seems more and more near now. We shall probably go back for a short *repos* before the big attacks which should not be far off now. I am not going to write you any more at length before these big events come off. Words are perfectly futile at such a time and serve no earthly purpose. I have already said all I have to say,—how I am glad to be here, have no regrets, and would wish to be nowhere else in the world than where I am. We both have to be brave, and you, even, one thing more,—patient. When we go into action, you will know it, for the French *communiqué* will be brilliant that day for the first time since we helped make it so last Fall in Champagne. As I say, we shall probably not leave the trenches in first wave, but will be *troupes de poursuite*. If we do as well as the Russians are doing in Galicia, we ought to have some wonderful moments. If wounded, will telegraph immediately. . . .

### TO HIS MARRAINE

June 18, 1916.

Back again on the front. But by a lucky chance our return fell just the morning after the company had come back to the *barraquements* in the park of the château for a week's *repos* after five weeks in the trenches. So this

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has prolonged a little the *bonne vie* of the *arrière*. No village to buy things and have afterdinner coffee in, but very beautiful surroundings, quiet walks to muse in, peace, and for material comforts milk and eggs can be bought at the *château* now. I sleep no longer in the *barraquements* but have spread my bed out in the woods, and although I have not been able to find any straw yet, I sleep very well on the ground. . . .

Do not worry about the length of your letters or the pleasure it gives me to receive them. Cicero, asked which of Demosthenes' orations he liked best, replied: "The longest." It is the same thing.

The prospects of an early *relève*, of a change of scenery and participating in a big action, make these days very exciting. Will let you know about all our movements.

June 21, 1916.

Left our quiet sector in the centre this morning, relieved by a territorial regiment. Have marched here to a little village in the rear. Tomorrow take the train for an unknown destination. Fine hot summer weather. The big attacks will come soon now. Wish us good success. It is very exciting to be on the move at last, and I am happy and contented. I



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return you the Tennyson, to lighten my sack.  
. . . I am twenty-eight years old tomorrow.\*

### TO HIS MARRAINE

June 24, 1916.

. . . We had a hard journey coming here. After an early morning's march of about ten kilometers, we took the train and made a trip of four or five hours. Then we started off in the heat of the day on what was without exception the hardest march I have ever made. There were 20 kilometers to do through the blazing sun and in a cloud of dust. Something around 30 kilos on the back. About 50 per cent dropped by the way. By making a supreme effort I managed to get in at the finish with the fifteen men that were all that was left of the section. The men were out of training after so long in

\* This letter enclosed his last poem:

Clouds rosy-tinted in the setting sun,  
Depths of the azure eastern sky between,  
Plains where the poplar-bordered highways run,  
Patched with a hundred tints of brown and green,—  
Beauty of Earth, when in thy harmonies  
The cannon's note has ceased to be a part,  
I shall return once more and bring to these  
The worship of an undivided heart.  
Of those sweet potentialities that wait  
For my heart's deep desire to fecundate  
I shall resume the search, if Fortune grants;  
And the great cities of the world shall yet  
Be golden frames for me in which to set  
New masterpieces of more rare romance.

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the trenches without practise. The battle-field has no terrors after trials like these that demand just as much grit and often more suffering.

I shall probably write nothing but post-cards henceforth. In moments like these, words are futile. Think of me when you read the first big communiqué, which we shall have had a brilliant share in making.

### TO A FRIEND

June 28, 1916.

We go up to the attack tomorrow. This will probably be the biggest thing yet. We are to have the honor of marching in the first wave. No sacks, but two *musettes*, *toile de tente* slung over shoulder, plenty of cartridges, grenades, and *baïonnette au canon*.

I will write you soon if I get through all right. If not, my only earthly care is for my poems. Add the ode I sent you and the three sonnets to my last volume and you will have *opera omnia quæ existant*.

I am glad to be going in first wave. If you are in this thing at all it is best to be in to the limit. And this is the supreme experience.

## XII

### CONCLUSION

The happenings of the next few days, the last that Alan Seeger passed on earth, have been told by his comrade and friend, Rif Baer, an Egyptian, in these words:

During the night of June 30-July 1 we left Bayonvillers to move nearer the firing line. We went to Proyard as reserves. At 8 o'clock on the morning of July 1st there was roll call for the day's orders and we were told that the general offensive would begin at 9 without us, as we were in reserve, and that we should be notified of the day and hour that we were to go into action. When this report was finished we were ordered to shell fatigue, unloading 8 inch shells from automobile trucks which brought them up to our position.

All was hustle and bustle. The Colonial regiments had carried the first German lines and thousands and thousands of prisoners kept arriving and leaving. Ambulances filed along the roads continuously. As news began to arrive we left our work to seek more details;

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everything we could learn seemed to augur well.

About 4 P. M. we left Proyard for Fontaine-les-Cappy and in the first line. Alan was beaming with joy and full of impatience for the order to join the action. Everywhere delirious joy reigned at having driven the enemy back without loss for us. We believed that no further resistance would be met and that our shock attack would finish the Germans. After passing the night at Fontaine-les-Cappy we moved in the morning toward what had been the German first lines. I passed almost all the day with Alan. He was perfectly happy.

"My dream is coming true," he said to me, "and perhaps tomorrow we shall attack. I am more than satisfied, but it's too bad about our July 4th leave. I cannot hope to see Paris again now before the 6th or 7th, but if this leave is not granted me, 'Maktoob, maktoob,'" he finished with a smile.

The field of battle was relatively calm, a few shells fell, fired by the enemy in retreat, and our troops were advancing on all sides. The Colonials had taken Assevillers and the next day we were to take their place in first line. On July 3rd about noon we moved toward Assevillers to relieve the Colonials at nightfall. Alan and I visited Assevillers, the next morning,

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picking up souvenirs, postcards, letters, soldiers' notebooks, and chatting all the time, when suddenly a voice called out: "The company will fall in to go to the first line."

About 4 o'clock the order came to get ready for the attack. None could help thinking of what the next few hours would bring. One minute's anguish and then, once in the ranks, faces became calm and serene, a kind of gravity falling upon them, while on each could be read the determination and expectation of victory. Two battalions were to attack Belloy-en-Santerre, our company being the reserve of battalion. The companies forming the first wave were deployed on the plain. Bayonets glittered in the air above the corn, already quite tall.

The first section (Alan's section) formed the right and vanguard of the company and mine formed the left wing. After the first bound forward, we lay flat on the ground, and I saw the first section advancing beyond us and making toward the extreme right of the village of Belloy-en-Santerre. I caught sight of Seeger and called to him, making a sign with my hand.

He answered with a smile. How pale he was! His tall silhouette stood out on the green of the cornfield. He was the tallest man in his section. His head erect, and pride in his eye, I

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saw him running forward, with bayonet fixed. Soon he disappeared and that was the last time I saw my friend. . . .

Another participant in the attack upon Belloy-en-Santerre wrote for *La Liberté* of Paris the stirring account, of which this is a translation:

Six o'clock at night.

The Legion attacks Belloy-en-Santerre. The 3rd battalion is to carry the southern part of the village. With a rush, it starts, its two leading companies pressing straight forward, beneath the crash of bursting shells, across a chaos of detonations. . . . *En avant!*

The men hurry on, clutching tightly their arms; some set their teeth, others shout.

Three hundred metres yet to cross and they will reach the enemy. . . . *En avant!*

But suddenly, hands relax their grasp, arms open, bodies stagger and fall, as the clatter of the German mitrailleuses spreads death over the plain where, but a moment before, men were passing.

Hidden in the road from Estrées to Belloy, they have taken our men in flank, cutting to pieces the 11th company.

Cries of anguish come from the tall grass, then the calls of the unhurt for their chiefs. But all, officers and subalterns, have fallen.

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"My captain. . . . My lieutenant. . . . Sergeant. . . ."

No answer.

Suddenly a voice is heard: "No more chiefs left. Come on, all the same, *nom de Dieu!* Come on! Lie flat, boys, he that lifts his head is done for. *En avant!*"

And the legionaries, crawling onward, continue the attack.

The wounded see the second wave pass, then the third. . . . They cheer on their comrades:

"Courage, fellows, death to the Boches! On with you!"

One of them sobs with rage: "To think I can't go too!"

And the high grasses shudder, their roots trodden by the men, their tops fanned by the hail of projectiles.

From the sunken road the German mitrail-leuses work unceasingly. . . .

Now, in all the plain, not a movement; the living have passed out of sight. The dead, out-stretched, are as if asleep, the wounded are silent; they listen, they listen to the battle with all their ears, this battle so near to them, but in which they have no part. They wait to hear the shout of their comrades in the supreme hour of the great assault. . . . "Where are they now?" they murmur. . . .

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Of a sudden, from the distance over there towards Belloy, a great clamor is heard:

"*En avant! Vive la Légion. Ah. . . . Ah. . . . Ah. . . .*"

And the notes of a bugle pierce the air; it is the brave Renard who sounds the charge.

The Legion, in a final bound, reaches the village. . . . The grenades burst, the mitrailleuses rattle. . . .

A time which seems to the wounded, lying in the field, to be beyond measure, interminable, a time of anguish, during which one pictures man killing man, face to face, in hand to hand conflict.

The dying look up, the wounded raise themselves, as if all must see how the battle goes.

Then from across the field of combat a cry arises, swells, grows louder, louder: "They are there, it is over, Belloy is taken!"

And the wounded cry: "They have won. Belloy is taken!"

They are magnificent, those men, haggard, bleeding. It is the *Legion fallen* that salutes the glory of the *Legion living*:

"Belloy is ours! *Vive la France! Vive la Légion! Vive la France!*"

Among those who,

In that fine onslaught that no fire could halt  
Parted impetuous to their first assault,



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one of the first to fall was Alan Seeger. Mortally wounded, it was his fate to see his comrades pass him in their splendid charge and to forego the supreme moment of victory to which he had looked forward through so many months of bitterest hardship and trial. Together with those other generous wounded of the *Legion fallen*, he cheered on the fresh files as they came up to the attack and listened anxiously for the cries of triumph which should tell of their success.

It was no moment for rescue. In that zone of deadly cross-fire there could be but one thought,—to get beyond it alive, if possible. So it was not until the next day that his body was found and buried, with scores of his comrades, on the battle-field of Belloy-en-Santerre.

There, on the outskirts of the little village,

The soldier rests. Now round him undismayed  
The cannon thunders, and at night he lies  
At peace beneath the eternal fusillade. . .

That other generations might possess—  
From shame and menace free in years to come—  
A richer heritage of happiness,  
He marched to that heroic martyrdom.

THE END







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